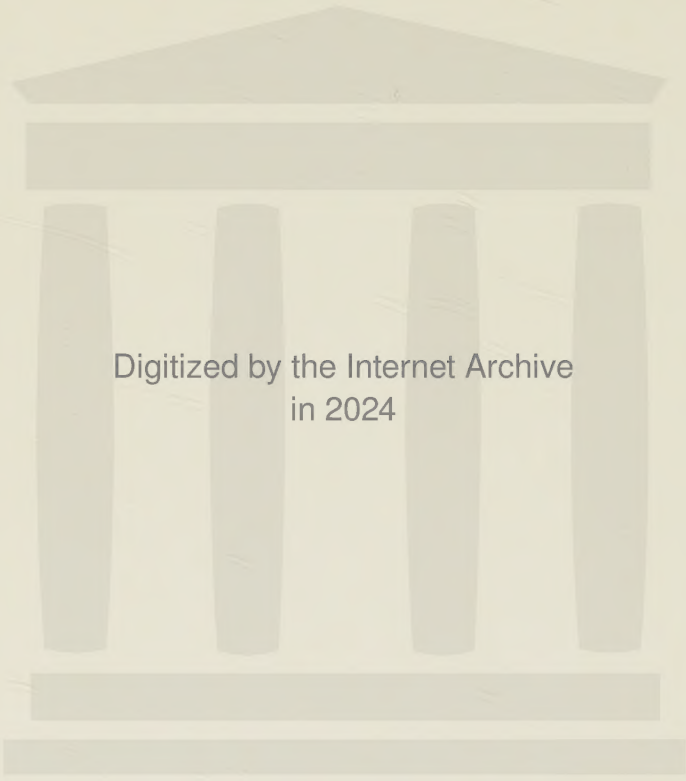
THE REACTIONARY IMPERATIVE

Essays Literary & Political

M. E. BRADFORD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For
Harriet Chappell Owsley

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Essays Literary & Political

M. E. Bradford

Sherwood Sugden & Company
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Preface

It is a characteristic of authors that they like to believe they knew what they were doing and where they would come out from the moment they first began a book. Such is an assumption supported primarily by a capacity to interpolate present thinking into past performances: the fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. The essays gathered below I will specify from the first are not an exercise of cold and calculated premeditation, with each word and phrase interconnected to every other from the moment of their composition.

However, these papers combine naturally and for reasons more significant than common authorship. For after a course of years it is possible to look back and see the development of certain formative preoccupations out of which the lineaments of a vocation emerge and take shape, *seriatim*, through a series of discrete performances. We change less than we know. But we do not recognize how little our focus alters until we can in retrospect discover how many times we have said the same things, though in different ways.

The arguments of most of these papers stand in some reactive relation to the modern spirit of private judgment, solipsism and assertive alienation which has its literary apotheosis in the figure of Stephen in Joyce's *Portrait*, its intellectual paradigm in Faust, and its political realization (at least among Anglo-Saxons) in Oliver Cromwell and/or Abraham Lincoln. Though I write betimes as critic or historian, rhetorician or political theorist, the focus on modernity and what it replaced is, in my work, persistent. That I do not take the world as we know it as the work of inevitability and that I am a traditionalist of a certain American species is made obvious by both the variety of my subjects and the undercurrent of relation which links them together. Hence my title. Extreme individualism *and* subjectivism *and* interiority are the reverse side of collectivism and oriental

subservience. Yet I speak not as just another echo of Eliot. For I am Whig and republican and argue in the attempt to recover the tradition of civic humanism as it has gathered on these shores under those American banners. Even so, my subject is often European, and in particular English. For my tradition makes no sense apart from English antecedents—an English past.

Allen Tate, in his collection entitled *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* and elsewhere, has argued that the modern conservative may recover his tradition only "by violence." His proposition is one which I have come to accept, at least in its broader applications. Yet there are at least two ways of being reactionary in the root sense of that term. One I connect with the sensible man who wishes to restore familiar arrangements that worked rather well and have been recently disrupted. A useful example of this temperament may be seen in Joshua Atherton of New Hampshire, a minor New England politician who played a notable role in that state's ratification convention which finally approved the Constitution of the United States. Atherton has been a puzzle to the scholars because they do not understand the ordinary meaning of reactionary, which I take to be "a person who regards all change as a potential danger to established felicity and the most recent change as anathema." Atherton was of this kind, being first a Tory, then an Antifederalist and then a supporter of Washington and Adams against the "wicked" influence of French radicalism.

The other kind of reactionary is a more complicated proposition because he operates according to some principle or prescription, going beyond the mere impulse to preserve. If we posit some norm of civilized behavior, or at least recognize violations of it after the fact, then the kind of change which occurred in Nigeria when the government of that country set out to destroy the Ibo people, one of their constituent populations, must be protested in conjunction with a demand that the said government return to its former policy of sporadic benevolence and toleration. In order to complain of an outrage it is more productive to invoke a bygone felicity than it is to insist on counsels of perfection, even though such returns never get all the way back to "the way things were," and something better than that is the eventual objective of the exhortation. "Reaction" is a necessary term in the intellectual context we inhabit late in the twentieth century because merely to conserve is sometimes to perpetuate what is outrageous. A standard for distinguishing between two kinds of reverence for a tested past can be drawn from the recent behavior of radical Federal judges and their apologists who have the audacity to argue a case for *stare decisis* with

respect to precedents laid down by the High Court under the leadership of Chief Justice Warren.

The irony of the contemporary situation of the conscious traditionalist is that, like Cardinal Newman in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, it is necessary for him to build his life out of the risks involved in perilous acts of private judgment made in order to recover a context of authority inside of which such acts are unusual. In this way I understand Mr. Tate's remarks about recovering by violence. The argument that the conservative mind is always in difficulty when it becomes aware of itself *as conservative* but is rarely articulate until thus provoked is an accurate description of a painful paradox.

The organization of *The Reactionary Imperative* reflects the distinctions drawn out in these prefatory observations. The first section of this book, "Literature and the Politics of Culture," contains essays which consider the place of literary history and the interpretation of specific texts in the larger analysis of modern culture. The essay on the social role of drama and the address on Frost and Faulkner raise questions about the value of modern poetics in encouraging a literature that will retain its audience. The former is a caveat upon contemporary American theater in all its deracinated eccentricity. The latter is a frontal attack on the use of modernist or Joycean aesthetics—a formula for self-transcendence—as an interpretive machinery for understanding all of modern American literature. The review essay on Norman Podhoretz confronts directly the relationship of politics and literature in the work of an influential, contemporary critic. It is an obvious counterpoint to the address on the American masters given at Kiel.

Section II, "An Instance Expanded," treats of three works by William Faulkner which are consistently misunderstood because rebellion against the variegated structure of reality which, according to most modern notions of personal self-realization, is the normal response to such recognized orderings, is not encouraged by their subject matter or design. These three essays, moreover, are not only invited by the formal properties of the narratives which they examine but are also made possible by my own willingness to consider alternatives to the standard modern response to such materials—an attitude which in my case negates any temptation to follow the crowd and agree that "deep down" the Mississippi writer was what the Boston/New York literati hoped he would be.

The third section of the book is entitled "Politics *Per Se*" and contains five chapters on the dilemma of a traditionalist conservative in

practicing American politics. "Where We Were Born and Raised" was originally an address given at a conference on Southern conservatism held at the Humanities Research Center in North Carolina in April 1985. It is of necessity a very general overview of a broad subject and elicited a vigorous response from other members of that symposium. Its intention is, however, discursive, not polemical. The other four chapters in this section are the partisan statements of a conservative speaking to others of his own kind. "Rhetoric and Respectability" was the presidential address given before the Philadelphia Society in April 1986. "Is the American Experience Conservative?" was read in October 1986 at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., as part of a series on "What Does It Mean to Be a Conservative?" "Undone by Victory" was part of a conference on the "derailment" of the "Reagan Counterrevolution" delivered at Hillsdale College in November 1985. "On Being Conservative in a Post-Liberal Era" was part of a symposium on the future of conservatism prepared for the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, in February 1986. All of these materials are by their nature and occasion very topical, unlike the essays and review essays gathered in the last section of this book.

"The Modern Spirit and Its Adversaries" is made up of eight essays on specific figures. It begins with Wellington, "The Great Duke," and Sir Walter Scott, and ends with Lyndon Johnson, C. Vann Woodward, Cromwell, and Abraham Lincoln, because these figures mark off the ends of the spectrum inside of which I have asked the reactionary questions and confronted the alternative, revolutionary answers. In each case the subject of these essays fought out a personal struggle with some form of modernity, either within himself or in his culture—or both. It is my opinion that the Faustian temper identified by Spengler as characteristic of Western culture since the Renaissance is most easily recognized in the intellectual biographies of individuals; and the instinctive struggle made against it in the form of Napoleon or Cromwell or Lincoln is also a matter of individual choice and determination, even though an army may eventually gather to carry out that iron resolve. John Taylor of Caroline, Frank L. Owsley, and C. Vann Woodward are, of course, American Southerners and Wellington is a British soldier-statesman. Alexander Hamilton is not exactly Bonaparte, or poor John Adams. And the attempt to conquer the Southern mind is only remotely related to the French effort to capture Brussels. But there *is* a thread. The Old Adversary's name is legion.

Many of these chapters were, as I have already indicated, speeches in their original form. I have made only minor revisions in their texts because their occasions are not readily separable from their contents. Furthermore, there is an availability, a negotiable quality, about the printed address which we cannot discover in private ruminations, interior monologues and diaries. Remembering the existence of an audience, though not fashionable in contemporary criticism, is protection against the lyricism of deconstruction, the self-regarding spirit which denies the objective reality outside the self. Moreover, it is a reminder that criticism is a social act. Hence I do not separate the citizen from the scholar, or the norms to which I am obviously committed from my reaction to their systematic violation in the culture of our era. For the present, being reactionary is, as Irving Howe has written in an antipodal response to the world, "steady work"—like sitting before the great gate of the city, awaiting the appearance or return of the Messiah. I expect the job to keep me busy.

Irving, Texas,
February, 1989

I.

LITERATURE AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE

Artists at Home: Frost and Faulkner

It is a paradox of our times that close observers of the American literary scene residing beyond our borders receive, from the self-appointed guardians of "high" culture and the life of the mind in my country, so little really useful direction or assistance in identifying what American writing is worthwhile or likely to retain its importance. Most of these mandarins teach in the universities of our Northeastern Megalopolis or in some other way define themselves by the use they make of the language. They owe their status to what they write for the newspapers and magazines of that almost closed society. By and large, they address only one another. Concerning the rest of the Republic, they have only conventional responses proceeding not from reflection but from fear, ignorance, and animosity. That this other America, in all of its antique multiplicity, should foster or possess serious literature is for them a contradiction in terms. Therefore I frequently advise Europeans of my acquaintance that they are mistaken in forming their view of American letters (or, for that matter, any other facet of our cultural life) through the filter of Boston/New York/Washington and their California satellites. To support this injunction I frequently advert to the confusion of the late Professor Lionel Trilling of Columbia University, a great authority on the modern era, when he brought to bear the myopia and insularity of (in his own words) "a narrow class of New York intellectuals" upon the handiwork of Robert Frost, our most respected twentieth-century poet, and William Faulkner, our finest novelist of the same generation.[1]

Trilling stands out in my mind because some twenty-five years ago I heard him deliver a lecture which, despite his standing among American scholars, convinced me immediately that his vision of the world was too special and small to account for the full spectrum of

American literature. He published this address under the title of "On the Teaching of Modern Literature."[2] In it he speaks knowingly of Yeats and Eliot, Joyce and Proust and Kafka, and invokes the examples of Nietzsche, Freud, and Mann. Rebellion, "a bitter line of hostility to civilization," *angst* and alienation are his themes. Only "patricians" and stupid boys will, in his opinion, dispute the modernist proposition that "art . . . is to liberate the individual from the tyranny of his culture."[3] A few years earlier (1959) he had ventilated the same assumptions in his celebrated speech on the occasion of Robert Frost's 85th birthday—a performance in which he abstracted from the verse of his subject all that was "rural" or hostile "to the life of the city," full of "old virtues, simplicities, pieties and ways of feeling," gathered in an "image of the Old America," leaving us what Trilling called "*my Frost*": a writer "full of bitter modern astonishment at the nature of human life."[4] Trilling and his associates in the Morningside Heights circle or with the *Partisan Review* had also by 1962 (the year of the novelist's death) begun to manipulate the public perception of William Faulkner by attributing to his work meanings not implicit there. In the 1930s and '40s some of the same advanced spirits did all they could to delay (or prevent) recognition of the Mississippian's artistic achievements. As an illustration of this activity, I mention only the criticism of Irving Howe, Norman Podhoretz, and Alfred Kazin. But there was much more of the same sort, and worse. Even after devastating correction of its wrongheaded and provincial character by such authorities as Cleanth Brooks and Michael Millgate, it continues to appear.[5] As with Trilling on Frost, the cause of confusion in all of this commentary is the determination to discover the modernist alienated artist, one of the "brothers of Icarus," a counterpart of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, where none exists.

Yet it is not surprising in a milieu created by Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, by Pound, the French Symbolists, Gide, and Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud that the exegetical *habitus* of which Trilling is symptomatic should have no way of recognizing artistic activity which does not fit its calculus. For that practice and frame of mind have shaped the dominant aesthetic tradition of our time, have (until very recently) faced little in the way of intellectually serious theoretical challenge, and could be illustrated and instanced from the works of gifted critics working in the contexts of Western cultures a long way from New York. I think immediately of Frank Kermode and Erich Heller. It would not be difficult to expand the list. For these causes (and by reason of this ambiance) I must admit that it is not only Europeans who are in danger of misconceiving the best American

writing of this century. They are not alone in bringing to these texts cultural expectations such as those which warp the gloss and explication of the metropolitan *cognoscenti*. It is only that these literati are somewhat more concentrated in their part of the United States than in the rest of the civilized world which requires me to connect them with a place. Indeed, even my own students (few of whom are from New York) find it difficult to describe an artist who derives his creative impetus from being rooted inside the *Gemeinschaft*—as a full member of a society that sustains his identity as a man and writer. And when in reading their own national literature their cultural assumptions as to what is possible do not fit artistic facts, a shock to their system and their taste occurs. With that surprise they are opened to the thought of an alternate model of the poet: as *vates* or memory-keeper, craftsman and vessel of prescription; as bard or *scop* who in the operations of his imagination assumes the fundamental legitimacy of his society.

Using the careers of Robert Frost and William Faulkner, with James Joyce set over against them as foil and archetypal modern, I will attempt to replicate the ground for this insight of awakening, to construct a corrective overlay, a better-colored glass through which to read their characteristic works; and to foster with it a notion of American complexity, of the variety of cultures operating within the total pattern of our national life, which may help to enrich and clarify our view of recent literary history.

The idea of the artist as one who transcends his inherited culture by power of intellect and will to belong to an invisible (and international) "republic of letters" is as old as the Renaissance or *die Aufklärung*. Distinterested rationality and skill in discourse were the preconditions of membership in this select company. Later, this civil dream was rejected by a more turbulent *aristoi* of sensibility, a group of enthusiastic souls who have troubled all Christendom with the superiority of their insights since Thomas Gray first wandered in his country churchyard and Werther's Charlotte murmured "Klopstock" while the lovers listened in rapture to the rumbling of distant thunder. However egalitarian their official politics, they knew themselves to belong to a higher human order, a visionary class of *Übermenschen* ready "to follow where airy voices lead," above the laws that bind mere ordinary men and women. Finally, late in the nineteenth century the pattern was extended with the rise of aestheticism. At this point we may invoke the spirit of Matthew Arnold, Professor Trilling's hero, who once proposed that great literature might some day (in its social role) replace the sacred texts of organized religion. Modernism begins

with such pretensions. Summarizing the relation between ethics and modernist aesthetic theory, Trilling speaks of the "experience of art projected into the actuality and totality of life as the ideal form of the moral life," which in turn is reflected in the language of Joyce's hero when he aspires to "form in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race."[6] The momentum from all of this self-congratulation and intellectual pride gathered behind the Irish master's alter-ego when he prayed to Daedalus (an equivalent of Faust), "Old Father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead."[7]

No conception of the origin and function of poetry could be more remote from that which operates in Joyce's *Portrait* than the hard pastoral, elegiac aesthetic of Robert Frost.[8] In language directly recalling Stephen's denial of home, fatherland and church, Frost wrote to a friend, "Freedom for taste and intellect? . . . Freedom from every prejudice in favor of state, home, church, morality, etc. . . . ? I am too much a creature of prejudice to . . . listen to such stuff. . . . I'd no more set out in pursuit of the truth than I would in pursuit of a living unless mounted on my prejudices."[9] Elsewhere Frost announces that "very few people that leave the good old folkways can keep from getting all mixed up in the mind."[10] These words reflect not just Frost's conscious convictions, but his entire temperament. He was a man of the prescription.

Frost's career as a poet begins when, after a visit to England, where he sought to gain perspective on his craft, he turned back to the place of his ancestors to find his muse—not to London, Paris, or New York, or to the deracinated life of urban intellectuals. *North of Boston* is the aggressive title of his first major book. Much of it was written in England. For, in the poet's own words, "I never saw New England as clearly as when I was in old England."[11] Early on, Frost had admired Shelley and thought himself a freethinker. (Faulkner passed through a similar "poetic" phase and preserved it in affectionate memory in his story "Carcassonne."[12]) But by 1915 Frost had renounced the poetry of Utopia (which he equated with hell), of "running after superwisdom" and escape in "huge gobs of sincerity."[13] His post of observation, speaking out of (but not simply to) New Hampshire, would be that of sage, offering in his quiet sayings and narratives "a momentary stay against confusion." That it was a conscious choice of posture he specified, saying, "My dream would be to get the thing started in London and then do the rest of it from a farm in New England where I would live cheap and get Yankier and Yankier."[14] In this plan he succeeded rather well.

John F. Lynen in his fine book *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost* observes that "the speaking voice in Frost's lyrics is certainly that of a particular person, but this person is also the spokesman of a community."[15] His pastoral is "concerned more with the rural way of life than with its scenery, more with the sense of values shared by a local society than with the intuitions of a single mind."[16] It is hard pastoral because it involves a testing and toughening through transactions with nature. Frost writes, "I make a virtue of my suffering."[17] The individual in society, men who "work together . . . /Whether they work together or apart," is a constant theme in Frost's verse. And his manner is suited to his matter: either understated and gnomic, like the riddle and wisdom poetry of the Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon; or discursive and conversational, combining the strategies of Horace with something of the tone of Wordsworth.

Deservedly one of the most famous of Frost's lyrics is "Birches," a poem which grows directly out of his life on a New Hampshire farm, one whose central image counters directly the motif of total transcendence or liberation so important in modernist literature. Frost begins with meticulous description and then eases almost imperceptibly into metaphor. The bending of birches makes him recall the games played with them by country lads and the great bending that occurs with ice storms. He remembers his own delight in "Kicking his way down through the air" and compares the beauty of these trees to that of girls with their hair thrown before them as they kneel to dry it in the sun. Then comes the turn which we learn to expect in Frost's work:

> So was I once myself a swinger of birches
> And so I dream of going back to be.
>
> * * * *
>
> I'd like to get away from earth awhile
> And then come back to it and begin over.
> May no fate willfully misunderstand me
> And half-grant what I wish and snatch me away
> Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
> I don't know where it's likely to go better.
> I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
> And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
> *Toward* heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
> But dipped its top and set me down again.
> That would be good both going and coming back.
> One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.[18]

For Robert Frost such guarded epiphanies are more than enough. Poetry provides them. But when this poet swings up, he always

swings back down—to the place where he began. Refreshment through a moment of exultation is naturally a gift of pastoral. But the transcendence is defined in relation to the ordinary business of man's life. The anxiety about sailing too high toward an arrival that would exclude the possibility of return to the world of promises and human connections is characteristic of Frost at his best.

The advantages of not expecting to swing too high, of resignation to the gravitational pull of a given reality which confines our will, and of preparation through rehearsal and ritual for our commerce with the ineluctable things are, of course, a major part of the burden of the elegiac lyric. Frost said often (in reaction to the kind of poetry that assumes an infinitely malleable world, one that can be "fixed") that his verse concerned "grief, not grievance." For its matter he chose "woes that nothing can be done for."[19]

In this vein of understatement in the face of difficulty, he wrote in "Acceptance": "Let the night be too dark for me to see/Into the future. Let what will be, be." And in the same spirit, in "Nothing Gold Can Stay" the poet says

> Nature's first green is gold,
> Her hardest hue to hold.
> Her early leaf's a flower;
> But only so an hour.
>
> Then leaf subsides to leaf.
> So Eden sank to grief,
> So dawn goes down to day.
> Nothing gold can stay.[20]

His longer pastorals are in the discursive mode and are manifestations of his development from farmer/teacher/elegiac poet into national sage. That wisdom should belong to the world of small towns and independent freeholders is part of the original American proposition—Jeffersonian. And like his Southern contemporary, the "sole owner and proprietor" of Yoknapatawpha County, Frost was a Jeffersonian Democrat, an advocate of state's rights, minimal government, and agrarian independence—part of the Old Republic whose lineaments are still visible in backcountry places such as Derry, New Hampshire, and Oxford, Mississippi. "New Hampshire" and "Build Soil—A Political Pastoral" explicitly reject (and make sport at the expense of) the cosmopolitan culture of the great cities of the Northeast. "New Hampshire," shaped on the example of the second and third epodes of Horace, begins with representative figures from three other states (or ways of life) and, with almost garrulous informality, brings Frost to

speak of his state, his own place there, and the relation of setting to performance in his own career. The theme of the poem emerges at that point: New Hampshire as "the mean and sure estate" where life "goes so unterribly." That its citizens are *not* the lofty radical souls Emerson wished them to be, determined to change the world, is altogether pleasing to this poet. The vast social experiment underway in the Soviet Union proves what happens to a writer living under the authority of abstract ideals. There, in Frost's phrase, "it's Pollyanna now or death."[21] Higher mountains, on the other hand, or a greater propensity to mischief among his neighbors would be good for the poet, would help him to put human nature in its place—though not too many New Hampshire folk require such correction, understanding as they do man's "middle" condition. Then suddenly Frost comes to his point:

> Lately in conversation with a New York alec
> About the new school of the pseudo-phallic
> I found myself in a close corner where
> I had to make an almost funny choice.
> 'Choose you which you will be—a prude or puke,
> Mewling and puking in the public arms.'
> 'Me for the hills where I don't have to choose.'[22]

A prude in this antithesis is one afraid of nature. A puke glorifies it, as in modern naturalistic fiction, with words—joins nature with words, and takes it over. To this false dilemma, Frost responds as did Faulkner. Neither total surrender nor outright total aggression will be Frost's way—neither pride nor humility:

> Well, if I have to choose one or the other,
> I choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer.

Though we may not recognize them as such, these lines are as much a statement concerning poetry as a comment on political economy. This poet's *persona* will situate himself north of Boston, because his language and his vision of the world derive from that context.[23]

"Build Soil—A Political Pastoral" is more directly political than "New Hampshire."[24] In imitating Virgil's first eclogue, Frost moralized his song. Using characters from his source, Meliboeus, a young farmer, and Tityrus, an older pastoral poet, Frost delivers a manifesto of regional self-reliance—a public poem for reading at that citadel of modernity, Harvard College. Here again Frost asserts that subsistence farming is *the* essentially human enterprise, and speculative politics (especially socialism) its enemy. Farmers may work "together" and "alone," be both neighborly and ruggedly individualistic. Yet still

he writes pastoral. For the survival of the yeoman farmer is important to Frost's imagination. As he told a reporter in the year before he wrote this poem, "Poetry is more often of the country than the city. Poetry is very rural-rustic. It stands as a reminder of rural life—as a resource—as a recourse."[25] Frost would see his small farms in the hands of people who have a more than commercial reason for preserving their situation—holding on to the land in self-reliance: in a symbiosis almost religious in its implications.

"Build Soil—A Political Pastoral" helps us to understand the relation of Frost's pastorals to his famous anthem, "The Gift Outright":

> The land was ours before we were the land's.
> She was our land more than a hundred years
> Before we were her people. She was ours
> In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
> But we were England's, still colonials,
> Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
> Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
> Something we were withholding made us weak
> Until we found it was ourselves
> We were withholding from our land of living,
> And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
> Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
> (The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
> To the land vaguely realizing westward,
> But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
> Such as she was, such as she would become.[26]

The tug of these lines goes in the opposite direction from the Daedelian image with which Joyce's *Portrait* concludes. But the distance between the mature work of William Faulkner and the modernist model may be even greater. The Faulkner of *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* is, of course, a master of the modernist technique. In these novels the action occurs within a consciousness, which is itself the subject. (We should recall here the incident of the young Faulkner in Paris, staring in silence across the room at Joyce.)

But before Faulkner published *The Unvanquished* (1938), modernity was more often the subject of his work than its doctrine. Indeed, much of his early fiction is an exposé of modernist attitudes toward rebellion, gnosis, solipsism, and self-realization. Dilsey, the black mammy who is the most self-effacing, religious, and traditional character in *The Sound and the Fury*, is the normative center of that fiction. Quentin Compson, the protagonist/narrator in *Absalom, Absalom!* is a young man undone by his inability to follow the (for him) commanding example of Henry Sutpen—whose story he recovers—as

brother, son, and heir. Quentin is a foil to the tireless will and vast design of the Promethean Thomas Sutpen, Henry's father. Pathos is the effect of Quentin's action, and tragedy that of his formal antagonist. Addie Bundren, the center of consciousness in *As I Lay Dying*, identifies with "the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the wild darkness."[27] She is in contrast with the near passivity or stasis of the rest of her family. Other Faulkner novels from the same period—*Flags in the Dust*, *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*—also depict a social reality that is hollow at its core, a vacuum where no enduring figure, balancing pride and humility, holds the social fabric together at its center. Faulkner's vision of a Mississippi fallen on evil days presupposes a much more patriarchal, hierarchically structured society than Frost's New Hampshire. Yet even the tortured work of his first decade resembles that of the New England poet in at least one respect: there is no brief for modernism, for a new and private perception of the good, in any of this material.

After 1938 the mature Faulkner rejects the style of modernist fiction, with its emphasis on subjective truth, as much as he does its point of view and thematic preoccupations.[28] The action in most of Faulkner's post-1938 fiction, once the overvoice as spokesman for corporate concerns begins to function in its unfolding, is the passing through time, between generations, of the values of stewardship and social responsibility to the inheritors of proprietary authority. Sometimes, as in the case of Ike McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses*, the transmission goes awry, is diverted from its course by overreactions to previous offenses committed against its standard—or by an excessive enthusiasm for an uncircumstanced freedom in "the communal anonymity of brotherhood": the kind of freedom learned in the company of woodsmen. Sometimes it is blunted or broken off by the unwillingness of well-born young men and women to live up to the obligations of their place in the world—because of a failure of the nerve disguised in the empty rhetoric of liberation. Such is almost the case in *Intruder in the Dust*, *Requiem for a Nun*, and *The Mansion*. But the impetus of these fables is back toward the given world of tribe and nation, not outward toward transcendence of origins.

Professor Trilling in *The Liberal Imagination* writes that the situation of the modern world made Faulkner know the "wrongness of the very tradition he loves."[29] This is an illustration of Orwellian "goodthink"—and a very mistaken judgment of the case. When asking how modern Faulkner was, we should also ask if any serious critic could imagine a Joyce novel which begins with "Grandfather said" (*The*

Reivers); or one that ends (like *The Reivers*) with an unironic discussion of the conduct expected of a gentleman. A county attorney, a man of the law like Gavin Stevens, is also an unlikely hero for the author of the *Portrait*. But it is with *The Unvanquished* that Faulkner becomes *vates*, the artist who has submitted his imagination to the inherited corporate spirit of his people as personified in the Sartoris family. These gentlefolk are, collectively, the protagonist in that novel and are saluted in its title as having survived enemies within and without during the War Between the States. The code of the planter class is given a positive treatment in most of Faulkner's later works—as if he meant them to be for subsequent generations a kind of conduct literature, as in Castiglione's *The Courtier*. It is that social tradition which, from within the structure of the books, judges the events depicted in the Snopes trilogy, *Knight's Gambit*, and *Intruder in the Dust*. And that tradition is explicitly revived in the high comic *coda* to the Yoknapatawpha series, *The Reivers*. An argument could be made that Faulkner is sometimes closer to the ethos of Balzac, Thackeray, and Sir Walter Scott than to James Joyce. Even in the debate over race relations in the United States, Faulkner searched *within* the tradition for a way of revising it. It is himself that he represents in that passage in *The Town* where on a hill above his mythical kingdom Gavin Stevens speaks of how "looking back and down, you see all Yoknapatawpha in the dying last of day beneath you" and "stand suzerain and solitary above the whole sum of your life."[30] And he put even more of his own experience into the texture and urgency of his language when he wrote,

> For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances which made more men than Garnett and Kemper and Armstead and Wilcox look grave yet it's going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't need even a fourteen-year-old boy to think *This time. Maybe this time* . . . .[31]

So much for Professor Trilling on Faulkner.

Yet the link between the New Hampshire poet and Mississippi novelist has a positive side that goes beyond a taste for archaic forms, beyond regional loyalties and hostility to modernist aberrations. For Faulkner also wrote hard pastoral—in memory of the nation's frontier

past. Like Frost, he called himself a farmer. Like Frost, he was an anti-rationalist and refused to be identified with intellectuals. His farmers/hunters are his finest characters. In *Go Down, Moses* the process by which they are instructed (the ritual of the hunt) is detailed, but then undercut by sentimentality, moral trauma, and muddled theology in the life of Ike McCaslin. But with "Race at Morning," Faulkner indicates what it is that Ike McCaslin misread from his education in "The Bear."[32] In a conversation between Mr. Ernest, a yeoman farmer who is the central character, and his foster son, an abandoned twelve-year-old whom the gruff widower found forted up in his sharecropper's house and took up behind him on his horse, the burden of the story unfolds. They have been two weeks in the Big Bottom, a place of communion with the ground of all being, with a Deity who "broods" and "watches," a place where God Himself would "have wanted to live . . . if He had been a man—the ground to walk on, the big woods, the trees and water and the game to live in it."[33] While in the forest, boy and man have pursued a stag which they finally bring to bay and then decline to kill. At this point the youthful narrator announces part of the meaning of this annual retreat to the hunting camp: that "the hunting and the farming wasn't two different things at all—they was jest the other side of each other."[34] Retreat and self-renewal lift the heart, confirm the dignity and value of life, and help the hunters to keep their promises in those social situations where men depend on one another and work is to be done. But the farm leads to the forest, just as the forest leads to the farm—as in Professor Northrop Frye's definition of pastoral *qua* archetypal action.[35]

Then Mr. Ernest expands this version of pastoral. What the hunters absorb during their retreat as it feeds into the other fifty weeks of their year must be rendered in discursive language and shared with other men. To that end the boy must go to school and then share his consciousness of pride and humility with his neighbors—"tell the folks that never had no chance to learn it; teach them how to do what's right, not just because they know it's right, but because they know now why it's right because you just showed them, told them, taught them why."[36] Which is precisely what Faulkner accomplishes in "Race at Morning," taking his transcendence back to earth—to serve family, state, and moral system.

* * *

So there is a great variety of American literature, some of it, as Europeans must recognize, reflecting views of the social role of the poet as old as the classical world, some of it implying the poetics of our early Republic, the United States before 1860, in which the writer was neither Promethean nor escapist but at peace with the fixed or providential and the inherited qualities of his condition. To find this literature on its own terms, we should not seek directions from *philosophes* or aesthetes who see in art an "alternate reality." But to identify it in the works of Frost and Faulkner is to locate part of what remains of the essential America, not visible in homogenizing goals or in the latest literary fashion from New York. That labor is worth your while.

NOTES

1. Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. ix.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–30; originally published in *Partisan Review* (January-February, 1961); delivered as an April 1960 address at Vanderbilt University.
3. *Beyond Culture*, p. xiii.
4. "Speech on Robert Frost: A Cultural Episode," *Partisan Review* 26 (Summer 1959): 445–52.
5. For a sample of Howe, I suggest *William Faulkner: A Critical Study* (New York: Random House, 1952); for Podhoretz, the Faulkner essays in *Doings and Undoings: The Fifties and After in American Writing* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Company, 1964), pp. 13–30; and for Kazin, *On Native Grounds* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942), pp. 453–70; or "In the Shadow of the South's Last Stand," *New York Herald Tribune Books* (February 20, 1938), p. 5. Podhoretz (p. 15) declares "I cannot discover a genuine sense of history in the Yoknapatawpha series."

A persistence in the New York view of Faulkner is indicated by such works as Myra Jehlen's *Class and Character in Faulkner's South* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976) and Edmond L. Volpe's *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (New York: Noonday Press, 1964).

The basic correction for this literary provincialism is contained in Cleanth Brooks's *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963) and in Michael Millgate's *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1968).

6. Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), p. xiv.
7. I quote here from the conclusion of Joyce's *Portrait*. A corrective to the modern reading of Joyce's masterpiece appears in Thomas H. Landess's "James Joyce and Aesthetic Gnosticism," *Modern Age* 23 (Spring 1979): 145–53. Joyce's language on spiritual revolution recalls a passage in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (New York: Critereon Books, 1955), translated by Annette Michelson, p. 252, where that savant observes that "revolutionary philosophy should be a philosophy of transcendence."
8. A good discussion of Robert Frost's submissive imagination appears on pp. 28–49 of Richard Poirier's *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
9. Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph 1915–1938* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 121.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 351.

11. John C. Kemp, *Robert Frost and New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 94.

12. William Faulkner, "Carcassonne," pp. 895-900 of *Collected Stories* (New York: Random House, 1950). See for discussion my "The Knight and the Artist: Tasso and Faulkner's 'Carcassonne'," *South Central Bulletin* 41 (Winter 1981): 88-90.

13. *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph, 1915-1938*, pp. 349 and 387.

14. Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Early Years 1874-1915* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 476.

15. John F. Lynen, *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 61.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Quoted from "New Hampshire" in *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), ed. by Edward C. Lathem, p. 166.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

19. *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph, 1915-1938*, p. 452.

20. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 222; the line from "Acceptance" appears on page 249.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 168. The entire poem is printed on pp. 158-72. Frost "attacked the tendency away from a society of self-made men—as he proudly considered himself—toward the welfare state, that he thought was the legacy of the New Deal." See Lawrance Thompson and R. H. Winnick, *Robert Frost: The Later Years, 1938-1963* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), pp. xvi-xvii.

22. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 170.

23. In *Robert Frost: The Later Years, 1938-1963*, p. 23, we find evidence that Frost thought long and hard about the social role of the poet. For he decided early that "his hope must be that his work will prove to have fitted into the nature of people . . . not into the nature of the Universe, but in some small way, at least into the nature of Americans." See also his letter to Senator Robert Taft on p. 186 of the same volume.

24. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, pp. 316-25.

25. *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph, 1915-1938*, p. 431.

26. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 348.

27. William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 162.

28. On the aesthetic of Faulkner's early fiction see Lewis Simpson, "Faulkner and the Legend of the Artist," pp. 69-100 of *Faulkner: Fifty Years After the Marble Faun* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1976), ed. by George H. Wolfe. I disagree with Professor Simpson about the implicit poetics of Faulkner's later fiction. For after *The Unvanquished* Faulkner, for the most part, put aside the drama of consciousness and often spoke as *vates*.

29. Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1954), p. 283. A telling instance of Trilling's myopia in reading Faulkner appears in his commentary on Faulkner's story "Barn Burning" as published in his textbook *The Experience of Literature* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 745-48.

30. *The Town* (New York: Random House, 1957), pp. 315-18.

31. *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: Random House, 1948), pp. 194-95. The ironic distance between this language and the author is slight, as is obvious in its texture.

32. See William Faulkner, *The Big Woods* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 175-98.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

35. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 182–85.

36. *The Big Woods*, p. 196; for commentary on this story see my essay "The Winding Horn: Hunting and the Making of Men in Faulkner's 'Race at Morning'," *Papers on English Language and Literature* I (Summer 1965): 272–78.

The Form and Pressure of Our Time: The Social Role of Modern Drama

To act out, in concert, before an audience, an interpretation of how men behave—or might behave, or ought not—is the universal disposition of our kind. Sometimes, in some places, this generic human impulse to dramatize develops no further than to provide a framework for the pantomime of the raconteur. At the other end of the spectrum, in other settings, it results in lengthy cycles of plays which are preserved for centuries as a part of a complex tradition and performed, year after year, in a certain sequence and under prescribed theatrical circumstances—as with the Noh plays of Japan. But my subject is not the variety of imitations which men may give to an action. It is rather the social utility of these species of "playacting," the need fulfilled by (and rationale implicit in) selective images of the human condition performed at various moments in theatrical history; and therefore the normative questions of what the theatre should be in an emotionally healthy society, reasonably at peace with itself and in agreement on the large questions that determine the value of life for the individual who is a member: should be *and should not*.

What follows is thus a composition of a specific rhetorical character and recognizable kind, in a genre as much forensic and admonitory as it is discursive: an exercise in judgment more on the model of Jeremy Collier's 1698 *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* than of John Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*; or Aristotle's *Poetics*. Like Collier, I focus on the condition of the stage in my own time, on its vulgarity, its encouragement of vice, its hostility to religious truth. But also like Collier (and unlike the Puritan or Platonist) I continue to acknowledge that the drama, when restored to its proper nature and once again in contact with its socially and ontologically pious origins, has its rightful place in the order of civilized

life and ought not be discouraged *per se*. For what we can learn from the long history of the stage, from the drama at its best, is why we should be displeased with the American theatre as we have known it in our day: a theatre either merely commercial or merely ideological, infected, by turns, with the aesthetic of sentimentality and wishful thinking or the more potent aesthetic of alienation—an anarchic, pseudo-religion destructive of the spirit of social responsibility in any art—especially a performing art; a theatre drawing its cultural impetus from the in-many-ways un-American city of New York: the locus of almost everything in our nation's intellectual life that works against the stability of an inherited regime more or less accepted in the rest of the country.

The Drama of Human Limitations

Thus before I begin to detail my indictment of the New York (and, generally, the modern) stage, I must speak at some length of old plays, laying a predicate drawn from the dramatic works of an earlier era which, in their power over an audience, still have much to teach contemporary playwrights who hope to produce something more than the merely commercial or fashionable in their art. To begin, we must remember that all theatre has its primordial origins in religious feeling, in some sense of the providentially given features of our condition as contingent beings, of human limits—and their source. Greek and Roman drama emerged from the pattern of religious observation, as did the drama of medieval Europe, the drama of India, Japan, Java, and Bali. Another common denominator with these originals of their kind is their rehearsal of the beginnings of things, their preoccupation with demigods and national heroes—and with the connection between character and fate in the lives of those who offend against heaven or the deepest values of their society.

Tragedy, of course, was originally (and necessarily) concerned with "great" men and women, their offenses against the gods, the misestimation of themselves that came from their magnanimity, their sense of their own value and merit. Old or "broad" comedy emerged from the farce comedy of the street and folk mummery which stands behind the *commedia del l'arte*; and from the treatment of human folly, hypocrisy and pretension (or the rescue given by the gods to undeserving mortals) that always had its place in the ancient theatrical festivals which dealt with more serious matters. Melodrama owes a little to both, to the satyr play and the comedy of no laughter, but a happy ending; and to the medieval tragedy *de casibus virorum*, the story of the

mighty man who falls not out of some flaw but because he has risen too high. Melodrama, according to Professor Robert Heilman, reduces the world to simple conflicts between good and evil, assuming that good men (with the help of a special providence) may "decontaminate" and "restore" the world to its "normal" proportions; and that playgoers will enjoy the spectacle of their victory.[1] In presuming that, no matter how we behave, everything will come right, melodrama points toward tragi-comedy and its pattern of unearned conclusion or to "dark" comedy, which strikes a grim note, despite its minimally "happy" conclusion. The former involves an unrealistic, sanguine view of the world—an adult version of the comfortable delusion of childhood. The latter knows better than to assume that the enemy is always outside the self, or to believe that we can dabble with fear and excitement and still be kept safe within the rollercoaster as it rushes downward toward what looks like ruin. Melodrama/tragi-comedy has been with us always, though the contemporary variety often turns the formula upside down, to a version of comic tragedy, bringing central characters not survival where it is undeserved, but ruin where it cannot be predicted or even explained.

One other important distinction must be made concerning the historic theatre. It is difficult to overemphasize the fact that it was a public art which sought to appeal to all levels of a given society, though not necessarily to each in the same way. Further, it was an occasion of the social cohesion which it presupposed—in this like the act of worship. Members of a community examined their image of human sorrow or felicity, their heroes and villains, *together*, and knew their unity as one people in the exercise—their agreement concerning social norms, the reasons for shame, the value of honor, the cost of love, and the deeper questions of "heaven's will thusward." It is perhaps unwise to speak of this traditional theatre as being democratic. Aristotle was correct and the Marxist critics mistaken about the idea of an "ordinary" tragic hero. Even Arthur Miller's Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* makes an extraordinary sacrifice—of his life—for love and what he wrongly perceives as the well-being of his family. And there is no traditional comedy without the realities of place and station. Even so, the great play does not exclude from involvement with its unfolding anyone in the inclusive audience for which it was designed or neglect to inform them why that action is a rehearsal of how things are, from their point of view: according to their experience of being not a series of disparate integers but "we." In other words, the role of the early dramatist was like that of the epic

poet in that his job presupposed the necessity for society and a social definition—not the necessity of distance and hostility between artist and audience.

As examples of medieval comedy which illustrate what that form achieves in communicating a sense of human limitations and the meaning of choice within those limits, of the gentle correction and rustic magic of the morality and mystery plays that grew out of the Mass, I suggest *Everyman*, the most famous work in its kind, and the *Secunda Pastorum*—called popularly *The Second Shepherd's Play*.[2] The mortal truth of *Everyman* is the almost comic thought that most of us behave as if we had forever, and are inevitably surprised by the proximity of death—such obliviousness being part of our nature. The play also reminds us of the connection between the grave and loneliness, another truth that we are reluctant to confront because it threatens us with isolation: that our failure to make provision for the care of souls is unaccountably foolish if we believe that we know how it might be done. It is a homely account of universal incapacity to recognize our own fate, sure and certain, in a summary representation of our collective vanity. *The Second Shepherd's Play*, as it retells the story of the Nativity, is a related parable/*narratio* of that ultimate expression of freedom which is the birth of the Son of God—and of the obligations imposed upon us by our reverence for that example, interspersed with low comic complaints against petty abuse and slender means: "the ills the flesh is heir to." In linking the story of Mak the thief and his wife, Gill, who hide a stolen lamb in their cradle and pretend it is their child, with the visit of plain English shepherds to the Manger of the Christ Child, the Wakefield Master makes the doctrine of charity concrete—visible—and brings home to his countrymen the routine applications of that measure of all charity which is summarized in the Cross.

As an illustration of satiric comedy, I recommend Aristophanes' *Clouds*, a play concerned with the effects of deracination on traditional society. Comedy as satire always has a target, chosen on the assumption that, though most of us can endure the charge of wickedness all too well, we cannot abide the prospect of being laughable or absurd. Satire creates a target for laughter—a target which precludes emulation. In the central section of satiric comedy there is place for reversal, embarrassment, and retreat from the folly which set the action in motion. Professor Northrop Frye speaks of this moment of inversion as "saturnalia"—after the "upsidedown day" of the Roman social calendar, a time when slaves and servants were released from the restraints

of rightful authority, allowed to be saucy, neglect work, and drink drams.[3] I know from the inside how this process of comic transformation works in *Clouds*—both because I have a son who is yet in school and because I was asked by the students of my university to play the role of Strepsiades (the angry rural conservative) in a public reading of that work. When the personality of that old farmer who wants "modern" training in dialectics and casuistry for his boy, Pheidippides, so that the young man can help him deal with creditors is seen for what it is, it is not difficult to understand why I was assigned the part. But the role is not peculiar among men in their middle years. Rather it is archetypal that they should be over-impressed by local Sophists and send their children to institutions of doublethink and arrogance like the one kept by Socrates and his apprentice debunkers. However, once the children of these men learn in this "reflectory" not just how to manipulate law and politics but also how to ignore their fathers, and do as they please, their education takes on a different meaning; and the enlightenment of their parents, a turning like that of Everyman and the Shepherds from what they originally intend, is complete. Seeing how speculative thinkers have ruined his son, Strepsiades declares, "Alas for my delusion! Mad indeed I was when for Socrates' sake I cast out the gods." Then, renouncing his daydreams, he burns down the "nest" of philosophers (a literal, physical structure with bizarre dimensions) in order to restore the inherited social and intellectual norms which have made Athens a great city and to punish those who have "insulted" the power of the gods. Almost all satiric comedy follows after this prescription in which the error satirized produces its own corrective.

The drama of the English Renaissance, the greatest theatrical explosion the world has ever seen, drew some of its impetus from the classical example, but more from the native theatre performed, on feast days, in the streets of such towns as Coventry, where as a boy Shakespeare saw the Herod referred to in *Hamlet* and the Vice, who was the original of Falstaff. The play from the era which I find to be most immediately useful in the context of this discussion is *Doctor Faustus* of Christopher Marlowe, a tragedy full of the new sense of human possibility and of the heroic reach of will and intellect which was the hallmark of the Renaissance. This new spirit, in that it redefined the gift of life and the scope of man's stewardship over the earth in a fashion that quite properly affirmed the goodness of creation (and not just its purgatorial function as a "moral proving ground"), also encouraged the error of what Harry Levin calls, with

graphic accuracy, the "overreacher," the man self-deified by his mastery of these many opportunities.[4] Such a one is the protagonist of Marlowe's classic play. But *Doctor Faustus* is not only an exploration of the experimental temper in what was, for Oswald Spengler, the representative modern figure; it is also (and primarily) a warning against that disposition and of its direful consequences, if not checked by some awareness of the moral order of the universe, the parameters of human freedom in things given and not subject to revision.[5] The audience of Marlowe's play is offered, for its time, a complete vision of the tragic experience in the image of a great scholar caught up in the pride of a mind which "is its own place." We share with Faustus the boredom of mere knowledge, the exhilaration of power made more exciting by its infernal source, and his final terror when the time of reckoning (a prospect he has almost ignored) has come. But though he offers to "burn his books" and fears damnation, Faustus has with contempt destroyed in himself the ability to repent fully of his sins, and goes, therefore, screaming toward judgment—thus completing in us the Renaissance version of what Aristotle calls "catharsis." From the author of *Everyman*, the Wakefield Master, Aristophanes, and Marlowe, we can recall what social purpose the theatre once served. That purpose informed the majority of the plays preserved in the dramatic tradition of the English-speaking stage (of which the American theatre is largely derivative), and is well remarked in the many-volume history of Allardyce Nicoll.[6]

After the Restoration of 1660, when the theatres closed by the Puritans were re-opened, reflecting lesser hopes and reduced moral certainties, mocking bourgeois respectability, pretension and absence of high style (or decorating the stage with the weighty and static spectacles of heroic drama, such as Dryden's *All for Love*), the inclusive and spontaneous connection between English playwrights and the larger audience known to Marlowe and Shakespeare was never restored. Instead, low melodrama and low farce held the stage—an echo of classic theatre, set off here and there by good foreign plays, anomalies with the virtues of the past, and "revivals." There were, of course, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fine satiric comedies, often modeled on the achievements of the French master, Molière, with their rich and detailed affirmations of the established "way" of French society, and also a few plays such as Joseph Addison's *Cato* which managed to treat seriously (almost as in epic) of the responsibilities of public life—with honor—even though not precisely tragic in their effect: plays that recall the dramas of Corneille. John Gay's *The Beggar's*

Opera, along with the Victorian musical plays of Gilbert and Sullivan, look toward *South Pacific* and *Annie*. They laugh a little at official postures and other foolishness, then end on a happy note, in some union—with more grace and less distortion of reality in the prototypes than in the contemporary incarnations of this theatrical subspecies. But sentimental musical drama is not what is wrong with the modern stage—to which subject I am now ready to turn.

The Legacy of Alienation

What there is about contemporary American theatre that, with reference to the long history of the drama and its social role, must be changed and/or restored is easily identified by a comparison of a few modern plays with the paradigms explored in my abstract of that record. The ancient healing, achieved communally under the watchful eye of the gods, in comic reversal or catharsis (or in the more complicated emotions generated by tragi-comedy), cannot be the result of such stark inactivity and lack of communication as we discover in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953).[7] In this model of all subsequent absurdist moralities man is the victim of a cosmic joke and the general connection between character and fate is denied. Moreover, as in so much modern drama, nothing happens in *Waiting for Godot*—no one comes, though Vladimir and Estragon, a pair of nondescripts, open the scene expecting a significant visitor. In this irrational universe, bleak but tinged with grim, grotesque laughter, self-pity finds its apotheosis, as Estragon declares, "nothing to be done." The two derelicts talk and try to kill time. For they have been led to expect something. But the curtain drops, leaving their expectation unfulfilled. The point is obvious, that no one is out there; only the mind is real, consciousness, as Beckett learned from his master, James Joyce. In erecting the congenital anticlericalism of Irish intellectuals into an abstract principle, Beckett strains the limits marked by social consensus, pious ontology and religious orthodoxy with his Cartesian exemplum. And, as I said, legions of dramatists have followed after him. The trouble with their adopted formula is that, even though it is natural for the good playwright to probe the boundaries within which he grew to manhood and learned his art, for him to discover what is essence and what is accident in his world, it is also necessary that there be (by general agreement) something there for him to probe—some standing arrangement of things.

Astute critics often find the epitome of Beckett's theatre in his skit, *Breath*. In this short play without words the curtain rises on an almost

empty stage, decorated only by a pile of trash. After ten seconds of silence we hear heavy breathing for the same length of time. This "event" is followed by another silence of equivalent duration and by the cry of a baby. Thus the play is ended, no sooner than it begins. Others find their representative Beckett in the longer *Acte sans paroles* (1958), in which a mute is tortured by sticks and water bottles. Both of these "creations" are relatives of a hypothetical naturalistic drama with which I have often set out to explain that variety of fatalism to my students—an action which begins with the meanderings of a little girl across a stage covered with flowers, representing a bright spring day in a meadow. After a little picking of posies, there is an unexplained blinding flash of lightning and the curtain falls.

To a portion of the American audience for serious theatre these plays are a challenge to reply with "no" in thunder—that such fables distort reality and insult the powers. For another group they are part of the artist's proper business in making complaints for us all against the outrage of our existence—and the related outrage of pretending that our mortal condition is circumscribed by genuine authorities and animated by a liberty we might well use. These find in modern theatre a plea for liberation, coupled with an indifference to the freedom which they claim. A final component of this audience will say with Hamlet that such works inspire us to face the truth in the spirit of existentialism, representing as does little else "the form and pressure of our time": will say that to expect catharsis, reversal or the process of healing by resolution from dramatists of our time is to ask them for an untruth. To the last two groups, content with the theatre as it has become, I have nothing to say. But speaking for the rest of my countrymen who are concerned about the future of the dramatic arts among us (and who doubt that modern drama is ironic at its own expense), I have a few suggestions—prescriptions which I will play off against the handiwork of Sam Shepard, a native heir of the European absurdists, and master of (in the language of his interpreter, Richard Gilman) "fragments, chunks of various sizes thrown out from the mother lode of urgent and heterogeneous imagination in which he has scrabbled with pick, shovel, gun butt, and hands."[8] One of Shepard's lesser plays, *Killer's Head*, is the monologue of a criminal as he sits in the electric chair, waiting for a flow of current. Naturally he is "cut off" in the midst of rumination—and his words are (again quoting Gilman) more of an "announcement" than part of an action.[9]

Shepard's Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Buried Child* does (unlike Beckett's silent plays) contain dialogue.[10] But this talk does very little

good in advancing an action—except as blows may serve that purpose. Grandfather, grandmother, sons and grandson talk. But no one listens to what is said—not even so much as in *Waiting for Godot*—except for the girlfriend of Vince, the grandson who has returned after an absence of six years. All of the family manage to whine a little and to abuse one another. There is a secret, long kept, of grandmother's illegitimate child, killed by grandfather years before. As the grandfather dies, his disturbed son Tilden, Vince's father, returns the long-buried remains of the child to the house. Vince has decided to stay and "see to it that things keep rolling," and his girlfriend, Shelley, leaves. There is more of a plot here than in most Shepard plays, but not really. Vince, in following his grandfather, will preserve only a familiar chaos of souls in isolation, a family bound in a moving but unchanging present by a "fixity of objectless rage." He might as well have written, "We are to the gods as flies to wanton boys. They kill us for their sport." There are surprises here and arbitrary acts, also much relation by blood, but no mimesis. Instead, Shepard and his generation almost return to choral song—except that he is not worried about a general audience, only a coterie of adepts.

The theatre of modern America loves to shock but has overdone the trick so often that our nerves are jaded and immune to further outrage. The analogy to the professional stage of our time is that theatre which St. Augustine, cultured man that he was, rejoiced to see in ruins. In New York it is informed by a mesh of radical taboos so inclusive that only Marxist, Freudian, homosexual, or Feminist subjects have a reasonable chance of being treated: plays derivative of Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller. Moreover, the New York stage is so strangled by union demands and fixed costs that very few elaborate productions can be attempted, most of them musicals. And even there ideology has become a factor in the equation—as when the staunchly conservative Daddy Warbucks of the comic strip is subjected, by Broadway's *Annie*, to the corrective influence of F. D. R. The economics of the New York stage are such that only private lives can be easily represented on it, two to four characters at the most, a few stereotypes, but no historical ambiance or spectacle—a more narrow focus than was encouraged in 1925 by the intellectual climate of Dayton, Tennessee.

The commitment of the New York stage to the values of that city—attitudes roundly rejected by most of the country—gives us a cultural capital that is happy with absurdist or protest drama and therefore alien to the civilization it is supposed to reflect in its art. The

patrons of that aberrant theatre have allowed the deracinated clerisy of aestheticism to dictate to them in questions of taste: to insist that the pseudo-religion of alienation (a problem in all modern literature), of reaction against family, nation and church, have a canonical authority over men and women of sensibility or soul. The old New York theatre of 1840–1945 was a more hopeful matter, was never dominated by one simple-minded aesthetic or psychology or politics and reflected respect for a consensus beneath the sectarian variety of this Republic: a distilled abstract of social and religious agreement embodied in civility and public orthodoxy. This regard for limits, their origin and the importance of moral freedom as exercised within the framework they create must be restored to the American drama if it is to be of any value to its ostensible audience. The aesthetic implicit in Hamlet's speech to the players, alluded to in my title, can still be the basis for that artistic counterrevolution — that is, if we give the process a little push.[11]

An important part of this work is, to be sure, a careful analysis of the discredited aesthetic of modernist drama. Independence of the example of the New York (and, usually, Hollywood) theatre for the American theatre outside New York is part of such cultural politics — as insisted upon by the patrons who sponsor it, but based on more than simple moralism or political reaction. A calculated program of revivals from within the tradition could also further the process, and the conscious sponsorship (with wide publicity directed to our men and women of letters) of a drama which does not take the limiting realities of the human condition as only a source of anger or resentment at the insult to self experienced in the acts of honorable men or the commands of God. New York must be allowed to dry up and blow away, theatrically speaking. An alternative coterie must be assembled, creating space for a rebirth like the miracle of what occurred in Ireland with the Abbey Theatre.

Good modern plays from Europe should be given close attention — plays such as *The Firebugs* by Max Frisch, containing laughter at the expense of our myopic meliorism, our refusal to see the worst coming, or to admit that civilization is being destroyed merely for the pleasure some derive from destruction: a myopia which recalls the decision of the townsmen in Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, that it is easier to join the beasts than it is to drive them out. For there is a positive example in any comedies that assume the reality of the society they expect to correct, and their stake in it.

But most of all we must do what Dionysius does in *The Frogs* of Aristophanes—send for Aeschylus, the great playwright who can save the city from its foolish passion for ingenuity. Not Euripides, who would take from the chance to advise his countrymen an opportunity to display his intellect. Not Harold Pinter or Edward Albee. But rather, old-fashioned, eloquent, though somewhat stuffy Aeschylus, who will efface himself to preserve Athens—even if that means telling the citizens unwelcome truths about what made their nation a power and a model to free men.

At the time of the play (405 B.C.), Euripides has just died; the Athenians are a divided people—about to lose (to Sparta) the Peloponnesian War; the conservative leaders of the *polis* have been ostracized; and Dionysius is fearful for the future of the people who do him honor with their annual theatrical contests. Mocked by Pluto, his servants, and a chorus of literal "croakers" (who serenade his crossing of the river Styx), he is then taken for a slave and beaten. Dionysius knows to make this choice (though earlier he had planned to bring up clever Euripides, the mocker), because he had just experimented with cunning and ingenuity in getting into Hades—in what turns out to be a painful trip. He chooses well, as one who has learned his lesson, and laughed at his own mistake. After what we have allowed the American theatre to become—almost by default—we should be able to do the same.

NOTES

1. See Robert B. Heilman, *The Ghost on the Ramparts and Other Essays in the Humanities* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1973), 141.

2. On the earliest English drama the classic account is Sir E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1903).

3. Frye's discussion of the pattern of comedy appears on 58–73 of *English Institute Essays, 1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), in an essay entitled "The Argument of Comedy."

4. Harry Levin, *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952).

5. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, tr. Charles F. Atkinson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932).

6. Nicoll wrote the history of English drama from 1660–1900 in five volumes; two books dealing with the masque; and a general history, *British Drama* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1925).

7. The special, sobering force of tragi-comedy comes out of a sense of the peril and great seriousness of certain decisions, even though they are without tragic consequences.

8. See Richard Gilman's "Introduction" to Sam Shepard's *Seven Plays* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), xv.

9. Ibid., xvii.
10. Sam Shepard, *Seven Plays*, 61–132.
11. *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene ii: Hamlet's speech to the players.

The Vocation of Norman Podhoretz

Norman Podhoretz, the editor of *Commentary*, describes himself as a New York Jewish intellectual. What that identity signifies and what it has done for the content and direction of his career he has been at some pains to tell us in his two volumes of memoirs, *Making It* (1967) and *Breaking Ranks* (1979). In a very distinctive milieu, a context created and sustained by a coterie (which Podhoretz has called "the Family") and an audience which has responded to it, he has, through several stages and transformations, made his way by what he writes, or encourages others to write, or says as a critic of their work. In his own construction of the segment of modern cultural history stamped by his achievements he has been inclined to explain the record with reference to his not inconsiderable ambitions and to speak honestly of the desire for fame, influence and reputation—what Dr. Johnson omitted in his simple formulation about the writer and the cash nexus. But there is another way of taking the evidence of Podhoretz's distinguished lifetime performance, and the latest addition to it. For Podhoretz has been educated twice over for a priesthood: once in the College of Jewish Theological Seminary, for one sort of rabbinate; and then again at Cambridge under F. R. Leavis, for another. And perhaps three times, if one considers the even larger influence of Lionel Trilling, that high priest of modern culture, in the nurture and admonition of his youth. Of all three of these novitiates we find direct consequences in *The Bloody Crossroads: Where Literature and Politics Meet*. For these distinctive educations in the interpretation of texts, in the preservation and application of tradition, were not incompatible. I shall attempt to explain why further along in these remarks. But for the moment the point I am making is that New York Jewish intellectuals have always been a clerisy, a partisan community with a gospel to be spread out into the highways and

hedges, a point of view—not a remnant hidden away from a world of which they have despaired. In this regard they resemble other American literary coteries—the New England Brahmins of the previous century and the Southerners who after 1930 stood in at least some relation to the Agrarian enterprise of that decade—and they continue to resemble those coteries even though they are now dispersed in several directions and share only a common history.

The overarching theme of Podhoretz's new book is the one announced in its title, a phrase from Professor Trilling's description of the point where literature and politics come together. A motif subsidiary to this larger concern is the use of culture as a political weapon—to claim the quasi-religious authority of the master spirits of modern art as a sanction for particular political programs. Another is the right of serious writing *per se* to claim the attention of the literary critic, who has been, since World War I, more directly concerned with imaginative creations than with works merely argumentative, discursive or expository. But if "criticism" is a "catch-all term for any writing about literature or culture in general," if Podhoretz has always been a "critic of public discourse," concerned with "issues . . . not ordinarily . . . regarded as falling within the competence of a literary critic," then it should not be surprising that he continues to go against the conventional definition of the man of letters and to focus "as a highly interested party" on "the social and political and cultural disputes of his day" instead of on those rare texts which are "pure and perfect objects of aesthetic contemplation."

In a time when politics, not religion, has become the queen of the sciences it is understandable that the formal and the topical, the reflective and the partisan implications of a particular modern text are almost inseparable. Podhoretz does very well in speaking of such literature. He does not deceive himself with the idea that high art exists in a supernal realm, beyond the contaminations of history, available to the disinterested contemplation of the gods—or to their gifted surrogates. And where he begins an essay with artistic evaluation *sensus strictus* he subsequently goes beyond those questions of formal realization in attempting to "relate an aesthetic judgment . . . to some social or cultural or literary issue outside the book itself": as he says of chief preceptor Trilling, "resonating" with a "political charge, . . . drenched in [the] politics" of cultural modernism and its antitypes. The alienation of the modern artist or intellectual from the pieties of a corporate identity is almost a given in Podhoretz's world: something

assumed among the literati, both now and when, as a younger man, he played an important role on the intellectual Left. Podhoretz had begun as an outsider among outsiders who "did not feel they belonged to America or that America belonged to them"—a phase in his life recorded memorably in his first collection of essays, *Doings and Undoings: The Fifties and After in American Writing* (1964). Yet a sense of the social reality of his time and place acted always as a restriction or condition on Podhoretz's critique of the American cultural scene. He could not bring himself to argue, even when he thought of himself as a radical, that his country was altogether a bad place for a New York Jewish intellectual to be situated. As a citizen of "a small community . . . which lived by its own laws," a detached person "not really a part of" the general American scene, Podhoretz drifted always toward a definition of the corporate thing with which he could come to terms. And to that definition he has recently arrived—a prophetic monitor from within, a friendly interpreter of an American regime shaped and sustained by democratic capitalism and the kind of culture which consorts well with a full affirmation of the "middle-class virtues and values." He is a defender of the fortress who can do the job well because he knows from his own life what the besiegers are like. A defender who, as he writes, never loses sight of what is at stake because he has brought with him to his new post within the walls all that he valued most from his youth—from the inceptional self who had learned his own Jewishness, *and* Trilling, *and* Leavis *and* what it meant to write for a living before he took over *Commentary* in 1960. According to a calculus detailed in *Breaking Ranks* and in his essay "The Adversary Culture and the New Class," he (and many of his circle) moved toward a rejection of the culture of alienation—of Marxism *and* the New Left *and* the old liberalism—generated out of that *culture*, emerging as a critic and commentator of and upon a set of revolutionary habits and assumptions he had once affirmed as a measure of all intellectual and moral integrity. All of which is the surprising, spectacular predicate of everything which Podhoretz writes today, and the authority for his now-special status among us.

The Bloody Crossroads may be most usefully examined and the measure of its author's achievement determined by dividing its contents into pairs or groups of essays which, in their particular relation to its general themes, should be sorted out from the rest and considered *seriatim*: speaking of what they have and do not have in common with the other materials gathered with them. The first of these

sets reminds us of the very different pattern of experience which distinguishes writers who were members of "the Family" and other men and women of letters who were (or are) their contemporaries but have no connection with their collective history as a special group or anything similar in the way of alienation and revolutionary politics. For members of "the Family," as for many (but not all) European intellectuals caught up by the socialist mood of the 30's, the theme of conversion and of retreat from a Leftist past has a centrality like that of the Matter of Britain or Matter of Troy for medieval poets of the generation of Chaucer. And this is especially true if the erstwhile members have come all the way out from the state of sin called Marxist Socialism—or from some equivalent extremity.

Those of us whose early education was not shaped by a passionate and monolithic commitment to the Left, whose friends, teachers and families never succumbed to the charms of an alien ideology or followed Stephen Dedalus in rejecting nation, kindred, and church, tire more readily at the repetitious accounts of reformed radicals—tales of how they stopped short "at the Finland Station," this side of the fateful border of Communism *per se*. For the "heroic" myth of these narratives makes sense only if a Leftist past is taken as axiomatic. Such incomprehension is my reaction to Podhoretz's anachronistic essay on the six radicals who produced *The God That Failed*, a book of no present interest to American intellectuals of any persuasion—unless their characters and talents were formed and directed under the tutelage of liberal anti-Communists of the East-Coast variety. But what appears as myopia or preoccupation in his essay on Spender, Koestler, Silone, Gide, Wright, and Fischer has in his treatments of Orwell and Camus an unmistakably positive effect. For both of these writers did their work in an atmosphere so intensely political as almost to threaten the integrity of their artistic powers: an atmosphere which called upon them to take a stand under simplistic or doctrinaire circumstances—to be "for the people" and moralistic when their sense of the human situation tended in none of these directions. Podhoretz understands both that atmosphere and the heroic resistance to it made by Orwell and Camus.

There is a cottage industry among liberal scholars working to reclaim Orwell for "burial" in ground consecrated by the Left. These savants labor to prove that Eric Blair didn't mean all that satire or those scathing reports about Spain, that he was in his heart still a good orthodox socialist when he wrote *Animal Farm* and an essay praising F. A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*. The poor man's bones cannot rest

because they might provide an aegis for reaction among ordinary men and women: because he writes so well and with a voice which still has a vital force. With this arrant nonsense Podhoretz deals admirably—and with the now-fashionable praise of Albert Camus as one whose novels suggest that "if he had lived he would have given up on anti-Communism and moved to the Left." Podhoretz gives the lie to all of this tendentious *post hoc* distortion and wishful thinking by summarizing attitudes already present in Orwell's work which, with new proof of the ability of capitalism to provide for a large majority of the people, Orwell would likely have accepted with honesty and appreciation as the lesson of recent history.

With Camus, as Podhoretz suggests, the critical problem is a little different. Though there is no evidence in such works as *The Fall*, *The Plague* or *The Rebel* of any leftward drift in the social thought of the French novelist, there are signs of "an unsuccessful struggle to summon up the full courage" to live up to his convictions and follow to their natural consequences the implications of his quarrels with Sartre and the rest of the French Left. Camus' choice of subjects means by itself that no such drift is to be expected, even if no other evidence were available as a basis for the prediction. Which, of course, is not the case. Indeed, it has been the business of recent commentary on Camus to belittle, de-emphasize and argue around the text of its subject as his works achieve their form through dramatization, texture, characterization and concentration around a central fable. Norman Podhoretz is especially well equipped to discuss these works because in most of them formal and political properties are one and the same. His essays on Orwell and Camus are critical and political acts—well and convincingly argued. They remind us that the war we are in is a struggle which will not be won easily and that literature is part of the struggle, whatever the purists wish it to be.

Another division of *The Bloody Crossroads* can be made of essays which treat of the memoirs of two famous Americans: the New England Brahmin, Henry Adams, whose autobiography is now an over-examined American classic, a book with which Podhoretz is rightfully impatient; and the former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, whose *The White House Years* and *The Years of Upheaval* are two-thirds of a memoir described by Podhoretz as "one of the great works of our time." The relationship of these two essays is instructive, in particular when we remember that Podhoretz himself has exhibited a mastery of the personal narrative. *Making It* and *Breaking Ranks: A*

Political Memoir are the fruitage of his conversion from the literary critic who wrote an occasional essay in opinion into the political columnist, editor, and public man who still writes an occasional piece of literary criticism to keep his hand in—even though he is now more concerned with foreign policy and the proper rhetoric for defending capitalism than he is with the new generation of post-modernist poets. It is clear how the change came about. For since the 1930's Southern writers have regularly turned aside from creative work and critical theory to speak vigorously about public affairs: to write "tracts against Communism" (the alternate title of *I'll Take My Stand*), biography, cultural analysis, and heated discussions of social policy.

That the "article as art" is the characteristic creative form for our moment in history is an old theory with Podhoretz: the discursive document so charged with imagination that it belongs finally to what De Quincey called the "literature of power." It is a view which presupposes that the novel, lyric, and the drama have abdicated their traditional roles, leaving "another channel" for release of the creative spirit of a generation: the article as lyric surrogate—like biography in the place of epic and reportage as Horatian satire. Podhoretz is obviously correct in maintaining that there are works which "succeed" even though they have great formal flaws—and others which have value as they "mirror" the "life of the here and now." To measure such books against "giants" is, for the literary journalist, self-defeating. And high journalism is what the spirit of the age calls upon the literati to produce. They struggle to speak of the writing done by their contemporaries without condemning it for solipsism, tendentiousness, and topicality—what Allen Tate calls "provincialism in time." The way this argument runs is unusual. It maintains that the Kissinger books are overwhelmingly important because of their subject and by reason of the lucidity with which they introduce us to important matters. I understand this historical, circumstantial argument. But I am not persuaded that Virgil's *Aeneid* did not do more for the cohesion of Roman civilization than any number of orations or comments on the "social wars." We must not confuse what is of current interest with that which is significant in itself.

But though I cannot agree with Podhoretz about the artistic merit of Dr. Kissinger's diplomatic lucubrations, I do concur with him that the two volumes have a virtue not to be found among the supercilious inanities of *The Education of Henry Adams*. And that virtue is engagement. In many volumes of history, fiction, correspondence, and

memoir, Henry Adams does not tell us what he might do for his country, but rather how he has been too refined to be called into its service. Henry Kissinger, on the other hand, has been in the midst of things, acting with good humor, poise, and a high degree of *élan* toward the successful management of the business of the Republic. The engaged man who confronts his times is also what we find in the Podhoretz memoirs. I applaud his choice and share in his preference for involvement. But I must also suggest that it is well that we remember what *his* teachers *and* mine insisted upon in the authoritative critical texts of our youth: that the highest forms of writing result from the author's achievement of some degree of detachment from the immediate problems of his world; that a greater kind of power can be generated out of distance and perspective—a power to be brought back from an inquiry into first things to reinvigorate the discussion of policy.

Podhoretz rounds out *The Bloody Crossroads* with two essays on literary exiles from Communist domination, on the Czech Milan Kundera and the Russian Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. These works combine naturally since it is the point of the first that Kundera is perhaps excessively careful about insulating the pure disinterestedness of his art against vulgar political application and Solzhenitsyn not careful enough about the artistry of his fiction. These differences do not prevent Podhoretz from praising both of these writers, though not in the same way or with the same reasons. His discussion of Kundera is in the form of a public letter to the author, and makes full, effective use of the resources of that genre. Kundera is urged, in the midst of warm praise for his comic gifts, to be careful that his reactions against simplistic attempts to make of his fiction nothing more than a comment on Stalinism are not used to give aid and comfort to the oppressors of his homeland. Podhoretz is persuasive. Kundera writes Menippean satire, which is never simple, never linear. He lives "through" the tradition of the European novel, and thus is as often concerned with the movement of consciousness as with the irritations of a totally regulated life under despotism. But though the laughter at the heart of his vision may indeed be more a defense against tyranny than a denial of its power over Czechoslovakia, Podhoretz's advice against the danger of being used which can come of reaction to the "mindlessness of politicization" is, in the case of the Czech novelist, well deserved. And Podhoretz's explanation of this reaction is a protection against Kundera's being "kidnapped" to a place where he

might face "a self-imposed" Yalta as bad as the one which enslaved his people.

Podhoretz admires Kundera because his books, unlike most modern fiction, do not give us "reinforcement of the by now endlessly reiterated idea that literary people are superior in every way to the businessmen, the politicians, the workers among whom they live—that they are more intelligent, more sensitive and morally finer than anyone else." Instead Kundera renders the world of "every day" as altered by Soviet power and the accommodation to that malignant reality made by men and women who are caught and have only a small private territory in which they may hope to preserve the meaning of their lives: sometimes, even in its spiritual and cultural dimension, altered beyond recognition. Even though Kundera is a presence in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, a voice delivering "brilliant little essays about the history of Czechoslovakia, or of music, or of literature, you Milan Kundera, were not the subject of this novel or the theme of these variations." Podhoretz's brief against Solzhenitsyn is that he cannot make the same statement concerning the Russian's art because he is not able "to transcend himself and enter into the experience, the 'skin' of others." According to this theory Solzhenitsyn lacks what Keats called "negative capability" and therefore cannot create characters who live dramatically in our minds once we have become acquainted with them in his pages.

That the formal qualities of Solzhenitsyn's fiction are not those of the modern novel and that his handiwork is not to Podhoretz's taste is beyond question. The body of Solzhenitsyn's work is huge and his subject depressing. Moreover, the formal characteristics of the Russian polyphonic novel, where several major characters are allowed to act as if they are independent of the author, are very little understood by critics whose taste has been shaped by British and American fiction. In addition, there is a certain monotony about much Russian literature, as there is with most parable or allegory. Yet I cannot concede concerning Solzhenitsyn that "in the novels he is serving himself, he belongs to himself alone." Or that his status as a great writer depends on his "secondary literature"—his non-fiction, *The Oak and the Calf* and *The Gulag Archipelago*. For the imagination of Solzhenitsyn is of the submissive variety, in keeping with his sense of the hand of God in his life as an artist: as imagination in the service of Providence, not "for the purpose of the author's dreams and aspirations." It is part of Solzhenitsyn's prophetic persona that his subject chose him, not he the subject. Finally his characters are no romantic projections but

"thoroughly convincing" and "richly credible." Nerzhin and Rubin in *The First Circle* are in no way two versions of the same personality, or of the author. Nikolai Lenin in *Lenin in Zurich* is a monster well worth remembering, a personage unlike any other. And Ivan Denisovich Shukhov in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* is a peasant who renders the enveloping action of Russian history within which suffering is an endlessly replicated norm. Solzhenitsyn tells us how civilized life can disappear. And how it can be rebuilt.

However, though it is necessary to question Podhoretz's low estimation of Solzhenitsyn as an artist, and to challenge his view of the aesthetics of non-fiction, he is quite correct about the larger cultural and political importance of the Russian's achievement as part of the conscience of the West—as the writer who made us look at Soviet society and the monstrosity of the Russian Communist regime for what they are and who leaves us only the alternative of self-confessed cowardice if we do not wish to hear the truth he tells. That role is prophetic. Podhoretz believes that Solzhenitsyn's interpretation of his own life as proof that he is an "instrument of the divine will" passes the tests for genuine religious experience established by the American philosopher William James. There is a miraculous ingredient in all of these survivals against the odds and in what Solzhenitsyn has made of them, returning to his people a "stolen" or "amputated" national memory: the prescription of Old Russia. The fact that his radical hostility to Marxism is that of a conservative traditionalist helps to explain its rigor. At the same time it suggests why his fiction, dealing as it does with a corporate life, seems wooden and powerless to a critic who finds the poetics which derive from such a social theory either mysterious or unconvincing.

Another old-fashioned writer is the English critic and moralist F. R. Leavis, the subject of the finest essay included in Podhoretz's new book. Leavis was of course what used to be called a "judicial critic." His characteristic exercise was not formal explication but the evaluation of texts—as he said, re-evaluation—and the determination of what he called "the great tradition" in English letters: of poetry which avoids empty eloquence, remote from the language of speech; and of novels filled with real characters, "a loosely generous provision of incident and scene" and "a marked moral intensity." Moral seriousness in this conception, as in lyric poetry at its best, "justifies itself as art in the realized concreteness that speaks for itself and *enacts* its moral significance." It renders reality, but does not tell about it. In

this matter of taste Leavis is a man of his time. But not otherwise. Podhoretz compares the Cambridge professor to the "rabbis of old" in their attempt at "fixing the scriptural canon." For the new "map or chart" of English literature drawn up by Leavis was, for him, the determination of the boundaries of a cultural substitute (or reinforcement) for religion—the secular equivalent of a set of sacred texts, available for "exegesis and devotional meditation"; and no more a mere entertainment than the Victorian "map" had been for Matthew Arnold, the other important prototype of Leavis, following Dr. Johnson, and the modern source of such ideas concerning the importance of literature to the preservation of a nation's character.

Podhoretz has in certain respects retained his faith in the cultural importance of the literary critic, his role as guardian of taste and the fountain of language. Moreover, though his role in works such as *The Present Danger* (1980) and *Why We Were in Vietnam* (1982) has become more and more restrictively that of political pundit and commentator, he continues to recognize that in order for the literary man to perform his appointed task, he must be able "to speak openly from a particular political perspective and to make political judgments without permitting such judgments to replace or obscure literary values as such . . . still [able] to recognize and acknowledge the literary power of a writer and at the same time to dislike or even loathe his work on political grounds." Leavis took and refined elements of the literary theory of Eliot to update the definitive cultural inheritance of English letters for his time. He prepared the way for continuity, set terms on which it might be possible and then found very little in the way of new writing to live up to his standards. Yet he accepted as truism the assumption that each age would re-express the immemorial norms for itself and then uphold them in its own way. For Podhoretz the scope for such activity became too narrow, and formalism became a method for overkill. Moreover, he found himself out of sympathy for what he calls the Luddite implications of a strictly literary tradition—at least as Leavis and some of the other master spirits of his generation saw that tradition. Podhoretz's definition of the writer as a larger and more meaningful category than "artist," as that term was understood by his teachers, is connected with his impatience at the anachronism and anti-rationalism, the mythopoeic posture of the great poets and novelists, and such of their interpreters as Professor Leavis. Podhoretz comprehends clearly what is "peculiarly fortifying and wholesome" or suggestive about the example of Leavis's lifetime performance, his total criticism. What he does not manage is the difference between

Leavis's hatred of C. P. Snow's *Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* or the scientific positivism which it recommends as the educated person's view of the world and the primitivist instinctualism of the counterculture or New Left. For the anti-modernism of the traditionalist conservative *qua* Luddite, suspicious of the Faustian temper of our age, has always been something far from what Podhoretz had in mind in presenting himself as the expositor of the American regime. And even now, after much refinement in his understanding of the conservatism of farm and village, small town and old community—and of its prescriptive, nomocratic urban or suburban manifestations, his doctrine is remote from contemporary versions of hearth and rooftree. Thus Podhoretz rightfully distinguishes the lesson of modern times as embodied in his life and the formula of Leavis, the example of Eliot and the position of Faulkner, Tate and the other Agrarians. Which brings me to say something about the cultural criticism of the most directly political essay in Podhoretz's new book and the value-system defended by himself and the other hierophants of neoconservatism.

"The Adversary Culture and the New Class" is useful intellectual history concerning the politics of culture—a subject little understood by elected, official spokesmen of the American Right, and by public figures in general. As I noted above, Norman Podhoretz escaped the restriction of being "merely" a literary critic because he realized early in his career that literary history was part of cultural history at large, and the interpreter of that history therefore a person of more general influence, especially over the contemporary scene—in a position like that of the Victorian prose prophets. Certainly a preoccupation with politics oversimplifies the nature of being and carries with it assumptions which scholars on the Left, and Right, sometimes attribute to the neoconservatives as a group: belief "in the power of ideas—the conviction that if you get the analysis of society straight, you'll accomplish great things." But Podhoretz and other neoconservatives are particularly aware that not only politics are political, but also that much modernist rejection of the philistinism of business civilization made in the name of an aesthetic judgment of the "quality of life" is essentially political in its intentions and sources. In recognizing the role of fashions in the world of the intellectuals (because he has helped to shape those fads himself) he can locate the motives behind their generation, the implications of Edmund Wilson's claim in *Axel's Castle*

that "the modernist revolution in the arts was analogous both in purpose and significance to the Russian Revolution: as the one represented a challenge to the rule of the bourgeoisie in the world of politics, the other represented a challenge to its rule in the world of imagination and ideas."

There is, to be sure, some myopia implicit in the neoconservative critique of the counterculture—myopia with respect to literary and cultural history. The opposition to the adversary culture of Podhoretz's analyses does not come only from "bourgeois" sources. Indeed the most devastating critique of alienation *qua* crusade issues, as he suggests in mentioning William Faulkner, from pre-capitalist roots, the old American ethos which derives from the fact that most of our forefathers sought out the New World not to start a business but to acquire land and the status of freeholder: from pieties which are recognized even in New York as different. But this incidental deficiency does not decrease the value of Podhoretz's explanation of the history that produced neoconservatism, or the value of the calculus produced by that circle of erstwhile radicals. Even though it is a hyperbole to speak of them as does James Atlas (in a recent issue of *The New York Times Magazine*) as "the dominant voice in American intellectual life," they perform a role in the context of the conservative counterrevolution which could come from no other source. Podhoretz's fine essay on "The Adversary Culture" is an anatomy of the "New Family," and the necessities which called it into being. It explains what is going on in the rest of *The Bloody Crossroads*.

Thus the vocation of Norman Podhoretz is one which keeps alive and in fruitful combination in his current work all of the texts and traditions which contributed to the formation of his mind and character. He practices it not in easy circumstances but among the unconverted. Along with the other neoconservatives, he realizes that civic culture and the life of the arts could easily disappear from the civilized world, or lose their authority over the mass of men as did the churches during the last century. Into that vacuum would of course come the state, thus diminishing the meaning of our lives as it has in other "good causes." And Podhoretz never forgets that we are in a war to the knife—never forgets that a sense of purpose is needed to keep a literary coterie going, even under friendly auspices. In the context of such awareness he has sustained his interest in literature and in one way of dealing with it—to our great profit and advantage. For his enemies are our enemies, if we care about the common good and have the courage to take our stand and fight in battles yet to come.

II.

AN INSTANCE EXPANDED

Brotherhood in "The Bear"

William Faulkner's "The Bear" is perhaps the most widely discussed of all his writings.[1] That it is now an American classic has been once and for all established by the publication of a "Bear" casebook. Most of the appropriate textbooks include this work, and it is taught everywhere. But I am convinced that "The Bear" has often been admired only for the wrong reasons, valued only because the critic found in the discussion of it a convenient platform for the ventilation of his favorite social and political obsessions. All such criticism—canonized by repetition, citation, and reprinting—stands between us and what Faulkner wrote.[2]

In section four of "The Bear" the story's young protagonist, Isaac McCaslin, renounces what he believes to be a tainted patrimony. Ike contends that there is a curse on his family's plantation, a curse put on it by his grandfather's miscegenation and incest. But he excuses himself from old Carothers McCaslin's sins by announcing that the plantation belongs to everyone, as at one time did all land in "the communal anonymity of brotherhood" (*Go Down, Moses*, 257). The remainder of *Go Down, Moses*, and especially "Delta Autumn," is, I believe, a negative comment on Ike's decision and the thought behind it.[3]

Ike's mistake in seeking freedom through abnegation is in part the result of his misinterpretation of the word "brotherhood." His assumption that no one ever really owns land or property unless he is himself in some sense owned by his possessions, his "place" in life, is sound. Land, property, place, condition or station is, to use Faulkner's own words, a fief, a grant "suzerain," of something to be held in trust, in a spirit of stewardship. It, along with sex, age, and all that inevitably appertains to the generic human condition, Faulkner insists must be endured in "pride and humility." But the doctrine of stewardship, of property, place, and an attendant order of interlocking authorities

and responsibilities can have nothing to do with the notion of an anonymous brotherhood. Neither is it compatible with the type of "freedom" which Ike claims he has earned in his initiation in the hunting ritual of the big woods (*Go Down, Moses*, 299–300). When asked in one of his conversations at the University of Virginia if Ike's predicament is typical of modern man in his alienation from his heritage, Faulkner said:

> Well, there are some people in any time and age that cannot face and cope with the problems. There seem to be three stages: The first says, This is rotten and I'll have no part of it. I will take death first. The second says, This is rotten. I don't like it. I can't do anything about it, but at least I will not participate in it myself. I will go off into a cave or climb a pillar to sit on. The third says, This stinks and I'm going to do something about it. McCaslin is the second. He says, This is bad and I will withdraw from it. What we need are people who will say, This is bad and I'm going to change it.[4]

And elsewhere in the same collection when asked what a good wife could have done for Ike without compromising his moral rectitude, Faulkner theorized:

> I would say, since we are supposing, if she had been that sort of woman, she would have understood his hatred of that condition, she might have been practical enough to say, This is the way we'll do it, we can't abandon these people, but let's do it this way, and he would have said, You're wiser than I, let's try it your way. That's possible, I would like to think that. But he would have stuck to his position, that I will not profit from this which is wrong and sinful.[5]

What Faulkner appears to be telling us in these comments on Ike's decision is that Ike did abandon his place as "The Man," The McCaslin; and in reaction to his own rhetorical emphasis upon certain now-magic words he allowed himself to be seduced by a shining vision of prelapsarian human relations in a flawless world.

Ike confuses brotherhood with the abstract conception of an anonymous equality; or rather, he imagines that the one presupposes the other. Faulkner, we should realize, never had any use for anonymous conditions, deploring "pressure on the individual to relinquish into one faceless serration like a mouthful of teeth . . ."[6] As he once said, it is the chief duty of the writer "to save the individual from anonymity," from "being desouled."[7] A brother is one whose relationship to others is by no means anonymous; it is defined by kinship, by blood, marriage, and a whole network of responsibilities, obligations, and affections. Members of a family may be equal in their love for one another, in the valuation they place on one another. But there is nothing further from the social ideals of doctrinaire egalitarianism

than the structure of the family unit; and for Faulkner the patriarchal/matriarchal family is the archetype of all natural society.

A brother is one whose place is defined by either his dependence upon or his responsibility for another. Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is implicitly egalitarian. It posits the "communal anonymity of brotherhood." But Ike's horror at his grandfather's sins, at the events recorded in the old ledgers of the McCaslin plantation commissary, has meaning only in terms of an ideal of brotherhood, of family and community relationships that insists (to use a phrase from Albert Schweitzer) that all brothers in the family of man are either "younger brothers or elder brothers," that some men are inevitably responsible for others and cannot "abandon them" to an equality that does not (and cannot) exist. It makes sense only to those who share with Burke—and Faulkner—the assumption that

> . . . the awful Author of our being is the Author of our place in the order of existence—and that, having disposed and marshalled us by a divine tactic, not according to our will, but according to His, He has in and by that disposition virtually subjected us to act the part which belongs to the place assigned us.[8]

That Faulkner believes the situation or place we work outward from in life is providential, "given" or inescapable and that such restrictions are the substance of whatever we create, inherit, or simply stumble into is indicated in most of his fiction. A little courage is required of a man if he is to "endure" his place in life. Young Lucius Priest's grandfather explains to him what it means to be a gentleman: "He faces anything. A gentleman accepts the responsibility of his actions [or his family's] and bears the burden of their consequences . . . "[9]

In the same spirit, V. K. Ratliff (though he at first protests, "I could do more, but I won't. I won't, I tell you!") takes it upon himself to contend with Flem Snopes when he realizes that he is the only member of the community who can effectively oppose Flem. As V. K. puts it, "I never made them Snopeses and I never made the folks that can't wait to bare their backsides to them."[10] But he feels obliged nevertheless to do what he can to check Snopesism.

Later Ratliff receives help, though it is sometimes ineffectual, from one of Faulkner's most representative gentlemen, Gavin Stevens—another flawed paradigm, who does better in *Knight's Gambit* and *Intruder in the Dust*. Gavin is almost as talkative as Ike, but more capable of growth. In the title story of *Go Down, Moses*, he brings the action of the novel full circle by taking Ike's place.[11] The self-

appointed task of Stevens and Ratliff is endless, but they "do the best [they] can."[12]

In like manner the Reverend Gail Hightower in *Light in August* (who in the early part of the novel very much resembles Ike in his retreat from involvement), when he realizes his friend Byron Bunch is compelling him to play an active part in the human scene, inwardly protests: "I won't! I won't! I have bought immunity. . . . I paid for it." But he goes on to deliver Lena Grove's baby and to attempt to save Joe Christmas's life. And in the process he recovers his place in the communal family and a sense of his own manhood.[13]

Still another of this company is Mr. Ernest in "Race at Morning," one of Faulkner's woodsmen. The old farmer, when he finds that a tenant family has abandoned their child on one of his holdings, accepts responsibility for the boy. At the end of his annual two weeks of self-renewal in the river-bottom hunting camp, Mr. Ernest explains to his adopted son that he expects him in his turn to assume the responsibilities that belong to his new situation. He must educate himself; and then he must use whatever advantages that learning and a little money have given to him to help the plain people of Yoknapatawpha County to realize their potential. In other words, he will do for his neighbors what Mr. Ernest did for him when he rode up to find the boy alone and frightened and said, "Get up behind."[14]

The list of "elder brothers and sisters" and good stewards could be greatly extended. Granny Millard in *The Unvanquished* is certainly one of them, as are Dilsey (*The Sound and the Fury*) and Elnora ("There Was a Queen"), Virginia Du Pre (*Sartoris*), Chick Mallison and Miss Habersham (*Intruder in the Dust*). Still another, though a reluctant one, is the tall convict in the "Old Man" section of *The Wild Palms*. There are many proprietary figures in Faulkner. But the characters whose practice of stewardship and acceptance of place most clearly and significantly contrasts with Ike's abnegation are his own progenitors: his father and his uncle, Buck and Buddy McCaslin; and his cousin/foster-father, McCaslin Edmonds.

Ike, insofar as he acts at all to rectify the wrongs done by his grandfather, acts (as did his father, uncle, and cousin) the role of elder brother to Carothers McCaslin's black descendants and to the various Edmonds boys who inherit the plantation he has refused. But once he rejects the example of his father, uncle, and cousin, Ike cannot play his role fully. After he has said to himself, "This is bad and I will withdraw from it," Ike no longer has the power or position to assume the brotherly/fatherly responsibilities which were his by birth and

prescriptive right. He cannot at the same time assume an equality of place with and still be responsible for the rest of his clan or for his less fortunate neighbors, the descendants of those people whom Buck and Buddy had looked after.[15] McCaslin Edmonds is as troubled by what he reads in the ledgers as Ike is. But as Professor John Hunt asserts in a letter to Cleanth Brooks (quoted in Brooks's *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*), if there is a hero in "The Bear," it is Cass; for ". . . he accepts the guilt as a burden, but unlike Isaac, he is not immobilized by it. Cass takes on responsibility, enters into the stream of life, even though he acknowledges the failure of justice to fulfill love."[16] He has the courage to live with his place, with the duties he has inherited; Ike does not. And though Cass warns Ike that the freedom from guilt he imagines he has acquired in the rejection of the plantation is illusory, Ike will not hear him.

In the long years of solitude and frustration which follow his resignation from the ontologically rooted duties of patriarchy, the years depicted in "Delta Autumn" in which he becomes "uncle" to all the County and father to none, Ike is torn between two conceptions of brotherhood, two conceptions of freedom. Insofar as he affects the lives of those around him (and especially in his efforts to fulfill the terms of his grandfather's will and mitigate the tragic consequences of Carothers's sins), he acknowledges the difference between freedom from profit at the expense of others and social isolation—anonymity. But in his *freedom from his place* as The McCaslin, he rejects the providentially given charge of his inheritance and ignores what he acknowledges elsewhere—that although all should be encouraged to be as independent as they are able to be, some will always have five talents, some three, and some only one.

Because they are preoccupied with the Negro "problem" or bemused by Ike's use of the word "brotherhood," Faulkner's critics have, for the most part, misread his character. Ike suffers from his mistaken dream of anonymous brotherhood—as does everyone in Yoknapatawpha County who has need of a man of his humanity in a place of influence. As Cleanth Brooks has suggested, the very point of *Go Down, Moses* is "that in spite of the beauty of the wilderness and what man can learn from it, we are not to believe in the existence of a world of no sin, no evil, no injustice"—a world in which no elder brothers are needed and the magic of "participation" in the wilderness can go on forever, preparing us for nothing beyond its own contemplative perfection.[17] In his decisive argument with his cousin McCaslin Edmonds, Ike declares that there are never enough Bucks and

Buddys in the world to serve God's purposes (*Go Down, Moses*, 283). Yet apparently he does not accept the logical conclusion which follows from his understanding of their worth. His dereliction is part of the general retreat from responsibility by the leaders of his society in the years after the War Between the States, a retreat which facilitates the rise of Snopesism. To read Ike's mistake as a grand moral gesture is to repeat the error which leaves unfulfilled the promise of his youth—and unprotected the "holy places" of the wilderness, the scenes of his boyhood communion with the great bear.

NOTES

1. "The Bear" is the central chapter of the novel *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Random House, 1942). It appears on pp. 191–331 of that text. At one time it was a common practice to view "The Bear" as a completely independent work of art, only vaguely connected to other stories gathered together in a mere collection. Faulkner himself discouraged this view. See Malcolm Cowley's *The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944–1962* (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 112–13.

All references to *Go Down, Moses* in this essay are documented internally.

2. Serious students of *Go Down, Moses* or of the structure of "The Bear" should read Andrew Lytle, *The Hero with the Private Parts* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), pp. 117–19; Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 244–78, 414–20; Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (London: Constable, 1966), pp. 201–14; John W. Hunt, *William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1965), pp. 137–68; Marion Montgomery, *Why Flannery O'Connor Stayed Home* (La Salle, IL: Sherwood Sugden & Co., 1981), pp. 52–53, 94–99, 103–05; the second edition of the casebook *Bear, Man and God: Eight Approaches to William Faulkner's "The Bear"* (New York: Random House, 1971), eds. Francis Lee Utley, Lynn Z. Bloom and Arthur F. Kinney; and M. E. Bradford, "The Gum Tree Scene: Observations on the Structure of 'The Bear'," *Southern Humanities Review*, 1 (Summer 1967): 141–50.

Noteworthy among more recent treatments of "The Bear" and *Go Down, Moses* are Larry M. Sams, "Isaac McCaslin and Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'," *Southern Review*, 12 (Summer 1976): 632–39; Warren Akin IV, "Providence and the Structure of *Go Down, Moses*," *Southern Review*, 18 (Summer 1982): 495–505; Thadious M. Davis, *Faulkner's Negro: Art and the Southern Context* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Paul S. Stein, "Ike McCaslin: Traumatized in a Hawthornian Wilderness," *Southern Literary Journal*, 12 (Spring 1980): 65–82; Margaret M. Dunn, "The Illusion of Freedom in *The Hamlet* and *Go Down, Moses*," *American Literature*, 57 (October 1985): 4007–023; Dirk Kuyk, Jr., *Threads Cable-Strong: William Faulkner's Go Down, Moses* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1983); Annette Benert, "The Four Fathers of Isaac McCaslin," *Southern Humanities Review*, 4 (Fall 1975): 423–33; Walter A. Davis, *An Act of Interpretation: A Critique of Literary Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 1–48; and John L. Selzer, " 'Go Down, Moses' and *Go Down Moses*," *Studies in American Fiction* (Spring 1985): 89–96.

3. "Delta Autumn" (*Go Down, Moses*, pp. 335–65) is a measure of the cost of Isaac's resignation of his patriarchal authority. Even in the hunting-camp, everything McCaslin fled from is now in charge—and the entire discipline of the hunt lost beyond recovery.

4. *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1959), eds. Frederick Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, pp. 245–46.

The distinction which Faulkner makes here echoes Dante's *Purgatorio*, Canto VII, 11. 130–31, where he depicts Henry III of England, who was full of piety and the passion for righteousness and worship but, for religion's sake, sinfully neglected his primary obligation as King. See the commentary on p. 124 of Dorothy L. Sayers's translation of *The Divine Comedy*, II: *Purgatory* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1955).

5. *Faulkner in the University*, p. 276.

6. Quoted from Faulkner's "Address to the American Academy of Arts and Letters upon Acceptance of the Gold Medal for Fiction" in James B. Meriwether's edition of *William Faulkner: Essays, Speeches and Public Letters* (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 169.

7. *Faulkner in the University*, p. 245.

8. *The Philosophy of Edmund Burke* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1960), eds. Louis Bredvold and R. G. Ross, p. 54.

9. *The Reivers* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 302.

10. *The Hamlet* (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 326.

11. In "Go Down, Moses" (*Go Down, Moses*, pp. 369–83), Gavin restores the family that is community by burying Samuel Worsham Beauchamp among his kindred, "rescuing" his remains from the clutch of Pharaoh and returning them to the home from which Roth Edmonds had expelled him.

12. *The Town* (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 106.

13. *Light in August* (New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 271, 355.

14. *Big Woods* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 175–98, esp. p. 196.

15. *The Unvanquished* (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 45.

16. *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, p. 374.

17. Ibid., pp. 418–19.

Brother, Son, and Heir: The Structural Focus of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

The subject to which William Faulkner was most powerfully drawn is that of the young man coming into his majority. It is, as a private and a public activity, recurrent in both the novels and the short fiction. Indeed, in a work where it is not the principal action we can nonetheless expect to find some kind of maturation operating in the foreground, defining that action and its human context. The thematic corollary of this matter is the question of pride: of pride's proper rôle in the formation of good character and of its necessary limitation in contingency. In a writer with Faulkner's well-developed sense of man as a social creature none of this should surprise. As a Southerner of his generation and class he was born to a knowledge of these things—and to an interest in them. The gentleman, the exemplar of ordinate pride and enactor of a providentially assigned place, sums up in his own person the possibility of a civil and religiously grounded social order. In him either presumption or passivity is communal and spiritual disaster. However, in the case of one Faulkner novel, the Southernness and the apparent social overtones of its fable have precluded clear understanding of its connection with his initiation stories. And, unfortunately, in that connection is the key to the book's design and meaning.

Even as it is usually taken, *Absalom, Absalom!* is ordinarily recognized as one of Faulkner's numerous dramatizations and explorations of pride, of the doleful consequences that can be expected to follow from the active alternative to what the Mississippi novelist calls "endurance".[1] I say recognized; but what I signify by the acknowledgment is that this book is habitually misread because certain of its more obvious features are readily and swiftly grasped by

even the casual reader—grasped and mislabeled as belonging to and identifying the novel as an especially fine version of the familiar allegory of race: that is, the fable of the wicked slaver, undone by his abusings of poor unfortunate chattels. By these features the reader has been tolled away from any consideration of the structure and focus of Faulkner's masterpiece, diverted into puzzlement and impatience with everything else he encounters in its slow unfolding which does not well accord with his original impressions and the expectations they engender. The ostensible subject of *Absalom, Absalom!* is the career of an archetypal self-made man and rebel against the rule of endurance, the adamantine titan—Thomas Sutpen. Several versions of his biography, interpretations of his character, and accounts of the after-effects of both on his descendants and associates are included. Clearly, Faulkner finds Sutpen's errors in pride fascinating, horrifying, and instructive. No other Faulkner character is less the gentleman; none other so plainly confirms the indispensability of the breed or its link with the history of the South. Something more than the fortunes of the *manqué* empire-builder, however, solicits our attention. Indeed, the emphasis upon and carefully projected revelation of the tale of Sutpen, so enthralling in itself, is in fact proof that, even if he is the formal cause and centerpiece of the novel's action, Thomas Sutpen so appears (and with such impact) because of the exceptional medium through which he, his heirs, victims, and "interested" contemporaries are filtered to us.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin Compson envelops the story of Thomas Sutpen. After the novelist has slowly and unobtrusively introduced and partially explained (especially on pages 12, 31, 33, 133, and 172 of the Random House edition) Quentin's haunted and retrospective bias, the Harvard freshman from Yoknapatawpha is left in the rest of the book (pages 172–73 and following) between the reader and the unfolding legend of a Southern Prometheus, a shadowy presence even when he is replaced or overcome by others in his rôle as narrator. Upon his consciousness the structure of the novel brings to bear all manner of facts and conjectures concerning the rise and fall of the House of Sutpen. That intelligence periodically (and toward the end of the book with increasing frequency) moves upstage and reminds us that Quentin is the one who has brought Sutpen into our presence and has sustained our involvement with his life's story. As the thread of the novel is spun out by associational links, we are brought more and more into dramatic involvement with this mind's divided and tormented activity. Implicitly omnipresent even in the

first five chapters of the novel, it suggests to us that there is in the history of Faulkner's puzzling *nouveau* portentous meaning never directly presented or explained. With Quentin looking at Sutpen the novel begins and ends. And *inside* this youth's consciousness occurs one of the two actions it depicts—structurally the more important one because it controls our perspective on the other, external, series of events. Quentin responding has no rival for our attention save the predictable Faulkner overvoice. And as that most nebulous presence does in the beginning, so it does throughout: it returns us to Quentin as soon as it has ushered him in.

In one sense, there is of course no disputing what Faulkner himself said of *Absalom, Absalom!* in the University of Virginia interviews, no disputing it even though he admitted at the time that he had forgotten a great deal about the novel. The book is "about" Thomas Sutpen. But it is most precisely about his impact on various people, only one of whom is Quentin Compson. What makes the overall Sutpen story peculiarly Quentin's is the fact that the structure of the novel brings it forward as the formative influence on his life—as part of the general pattern of time and the life of men in time which speaks reproachfully to him of his own dire extremity. Upon Quentin's gradually unfolding reaction to and understanding of his grandfather's ambitious neighbor the novel turns. All the Sutpen stories are foils to the "story" of their fused impact on Quentin. He is measured and defined as one of the unenduring by his synthesis, extrapolation, and abortive flight from these narratives. Out of his dialectic with them the novel moves forward.

Quentin Compson is the same person in *Absalom, Absalom!* that he is in *The Sound and the Fury*. He is unmanned by time and confused about what rule of life he should follow; he feels helpless before everything and everyone; and he suffers from guilt in that he is unable to resolve any of the questions which he must answer or submit to any of the duties he must assume. What we are shown of him in the earlier novel would lead us to expect this frailest of Compsons to be preoccupied with and pained by the Sutpen legend. Our anticipation is not disappointed. The pattern of Sutpen's rise and fall, the willed quality of his destruction, the inevitability of it once he has misinterpreted the "affront" given him as a boy, has formulated his design, and has seen it collapse in the conflict of his sons, Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon—these are ingredients in the total Sutpen story which have a dominion over Quentin's imagination.

However, it is not Thomas Sutpen's part of the Sutpen saga that most interests Quentin. As John Hunt remarks, "The focus of Quentin's interest is upon the reason why Henry killed Bon." For, as Quentin realizes, upon the explanation of Henry's action hinges the meaning of the entire Sutpen chronicle. Bon's death is its climax; and the futile attempts of an elderly Sutpen after the event to "come again" out of the ruins of his arbitrary dynastic dream serve only to emphasize with heavy irony (and even grotesquerie) the mistake which inspired his conduct, to underscore even while they at the same time tie together the loose ends of his life and round off its shape. Indeed, Sutpen's career becomes morally intelligible for all of those who in *Absalom!, Absalom!* share in its rehearsal and re-creation, and especially for Quentin, only in its extension into the lives of Sutpen's descendants.

The pattern of cause and effect, deeds and their endless afterlife—the stream of history within which, as Quentin puts it, "a man never outlives his father" and the ripples move endlessly outward and onward from the pebble casually tossed in—are what Quentin is made to dwell on by the record of the autocrat and his children. Not injustice to Negroes, not the monstrous evil of "designs," and not even the drama of strong wills in action (though this last is perpetually fascinating to the spineless young man) are for Quentin the burden of the dark tale which he presents to us. For him the point of the Sutpen legend (which he for a time resists but ultimately recognizes) is that "you can't get away," that there will be "nevermore of peace," that each man is arbitrarily assigned a place and responsibilities that go with it by his antecedents and the history of his people, and that he must "cope" with or be destroyed by them. The emotions provoked in Quentin by the spectacle of time's juggernaut coming down, through no fault of his own, upon Henry Sutpen are much like those which, we learn in *The Sound and the Fury*, run through his mind a few months later as, by breaking his watch, he prepares to commit suicide. Quentin's inability to interpret (or to accept his own interpretation of) the fratricide issues finally in the anguished equipoise of implications embodied in his concluding exchange with his Canadian roommate, Shreve McCannon. The exchange is a dramatization of Compson's non-endurance *and* of his disavowal of that very non-endurance: of the equivocal effect of his identification with whatever the Sutpen story implies to him that he should be. And we have to look back at his struggle to interpret the Sutpen "story" and the narratives which go into it, to comprehend from just what sort of rebellion against nature the boy suffers and from what his ambivalence stems.

Charles Bon is perhaps the most enigmatic and misunderstood character in *Absalom, Absalom!* Sutpen's son by a French-Haitian first wife, he is, with his mother, put aside by the "demon" when he discovers that they are part Negro and cannot be adjunctive to his "design." Bon is civilized, Latin, and remote. Faulkner does not probe him. We learn a little of what he did and of how others reacted to him. But even though Shreve identifies himself with Bon and creates for him (with the help of Miss Rosa and Quentin's father) a personality, motives, and an emotional life in conformity with the literary stereotypes of the wounded mulatto with which his culture has made him familiar, the reader of *Absalom, Absalom!* cannot really know Sutpen's eldest son. Nevertheless, weigh and judge him we (like Quentin) must. For upon that judgment will depend what we make of Henry's decision to kill him. About the culpability of Bon's father in both his "resignation" from his first family and the cold, legalistic spirit in which he walks away from them, there can be no question. Regard for women and children is at the heart of the chivalric pattern Sutpen mimics; to possess others is to be possessed by them. But the misguided and overzealous sympathy of many critics (encouraged by Quentin's passivity to Shreve's preemption and distortion in the last chapters of what is primarily Quentin's story) for Bon's sufferings, real and imagined, have obscured the fact that Bon *is* his father's son: very like his father, single-minded and inflexible in his pursuit of a chosen course; and in his effect on the lives of those he touches, destructive in the extreme. Faulkner criticism has done with Bon as with Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, Isaac McCaslin in "The Bear," and Lucas Beauchamp in other sections of *Go Down, Moses* (although with less violence in this last case). Because all are grist for the angelic mills, they are faulted in nothing. And those characters who stand in opposition to these chosen few are regularly condemned out of court. But mass obscurantism notwithstanding, Charles Bon probably "needs killing" when Henry finally brings himself to do the deed. Nor is it difficult to explain why.

We cannot be perfectly sure of our interpretation of Charles's motive for insisting that he and Judith marry. We do not know how much Bon learns about his parentage in his association with the Sutpens or what passes between him and Henry, his mother, or his father. But the more he knows, the worse we must believe him to be. And whatever we believe him to know, all the narrators in *Absalom, Absalom!* agree that Bon's usual reaction to any information is "So what?" or "Then what?". Therefore the question of how informed or instinctive (random) is his conduct with Henry and Judith is largely

beside the point. What we do know is that Bon intends (or at least leads Henry to think that he intends) to marry Judith Sutpen and that Henry, as a brother—given the world in which they all live—has no choice but to stop him. Judith is ignorant and (partly because of Henry) mesmerized by her sophisticated Byronic lover. That Bon is (in any recognizable sense of the word) in love with her, we (and Henry, and Quentin—and even Bon's "champion" Shreve) are never convinced. Sutpen will not take a hand in the matter of Bon and Judith; and it is left up to Henry to decide what will transpire. From the text of *Absalom, Absalom!* we can determine that Henry has (from his father, from Judith, and from long familiarity with his half-brother) all the evidence he needs to make an informed and considered determination. He knows that Bon is Thomas Sutpen's son, knows also that he is part Negro, and knows that it would be to consign Judith *and* Charles *and* any children they might have to a life of protracted and unamenable misery were he to permit this miscegenetic and incestuous marriage.

That Henry feels, once they reach the gate of Sutpen's Hundred, obliged to kill Charles does not tell us anything about his private racial attitudes. Actually there is much evidence in the novel that he puts considerations of family interest and blood connection ahead of all others. Moreover, his action cannot be taken as a reflection of (or on) the abstract assumptions of the Southern racial order, for he does not act in their behalf. He has already rejected some of the racial axioms governing that order in acknowledging Charles as his brother. Henry's reason is love, love for his sister which outweighs his affection for his brother, even though he also loves that brother. So great is his passion that he is almost maddened by what brother, sister, and father compel him to decide. Henry rejects his patrimony for Charles; he turns his face from the truth about the impropriety of his brother's presence among the Sutpens. But he will not permit his sister to be victimized by a situation she does not (and probably could not) understand. Only a choice between brother's interest and sister's—with the brother as the offending party in their conflict—could have provoked Henry to hurt Charles. In one of the most plausible of his imaginative reconstructions of what occurs between Henry and his elder brother, Shreve has Henry question why it could not have been any other choice that he had to make. However, Henry does "endure" his place, his rôle, when he is forced to see that the rôle is his and his alone, the particular history deposited on him as a Sutpen and as a keeper of the inviolable holies of the communal body. His decision is of the essence

of that order his father had bred him to represent. No other action could impress and intimidate Quentin Compson more forcefully.

To repeat, Charles Bon (and, indeed, his son Charles Etienne de Saint Velery Bon after him) is like Sutpen. But Henry (and to a lesser extent his sisters Judith and Clytie, following him) breaks the inherited mold. He is no utter monomaniac. According to his lights, he puts human values and needs ahead of theories and rigid formulations. He acknowledges that sequence of priorities in his responsibilities which his father has ignored, the order which demands that each man love and serve best what Burke calls "his own little platoon in society," that plain justice which General Compson insists that the elder Sutpen forgot when he imagined he could buy off a wife and child with money or logic, forgot that rule of chivalry which insists that above all else women are not to be taken as commodities. Quentin focuses on Henry because Henry makes and acts out (without a father's help) a decision about a sister, a decision which determines the fate of his family—a decision which we know from *The Sound and the Fury* Quentin himself believes he faces during the summer of the trip out to Sutpen's Hundred with Miss Rosa. Quentin's pain in retracing the Sutpen family story with Shreve in Chapters VI to IX of *Absalom, Absalom!* is far more intense because, in the interval of time which has lapsed since the beginning of the novel, he has failed to act at all, whereas Henry at least tried. Quentin too (in the other novel) inherits a world he never made; but unlike Henry's, his response to it is (his ineffectuality aside) formal, legalistic, and not "of the heart." The enduring, we must remember, "do the best they can"—and in order to do so quite often make a choice between evils; but they *do choose* rather than resign their "place."

If Henry's motives in his engagement with an inherited "curse" are not subject to serious censure, Judith's in her confrontation of the ruins Henry and the elder Sutpen leave are even less so. And Quentin's preoccupation with his own sister, as well as his interest in the inexorability of the on-flowing and outflowing of ripples from the "splash" in time's "pond" called Sutpen—the drama of iron wills toiling in the clutch of circumstance and cosmic justice—would be expected to draw him to her as to her father and brother. Judith Sutpen's stern and inflexible "coping" with the detritus of what had once been the two worlds of Thomas Sutpen, of the two value-systems which destroy each other when Henry kills Charles Bon, has received sympathetic and convincing treatment from Professor Cleanth Brooks. Until Charles is dead and Henry is gone forever from her world, Judith is

an almost passive observer of the struggle of determined men to decide her fate. But once the fiancé whom her brother and mother had chosen for her (and her father and brother had denied her) is a corpse in her house—the fiancé who had thus far inspired her one adult decision, to be loyal once committed—Judith becomes the central figure in the Sutpen story; and in one of the few portions of the novel based more on fact than conjecture (Chapter VI), she, like her brother, meets what she considers to be her (and her family's) obligations: meets them until she dies. She reasons that "somebody will have to take care of Clytie and father" and explains to General Compson that, as she understands life, "you keep on trying," even though the context in which people have their being is like a tapestry set up by a celestial rug-maker—a tapestry on which everyone "wants to weave his own pattern" and in which there is never a perfect order or proportion.

The chief business of her involuntary spinsterhood is the mulatto son of her mulatto brother/lover. She never knows that the boy is her kin or that his father is part Negro. But she does find his picture (and his mother's) on Charles's body. And out of her continued love and loyalty to Charles Bon and her tacitly acknowledged guilt (because *her* family has deprived the boy of *his*), she contacts young Bon's mother (Bon's quadroon concubine); and after that woman's death or defection, Judith assumes full responsibility for little Charles Etienne de Saint Velery Bon. Though she is aware that the child is part Negro, she and Clytie treat him *like one of their own blood.* She rears the child, tries to protect him when he discovers his mixed origins and reacts frantically to that knowledge, asks him to call her "aunt," and finally loses her life in attending his sickbed. Meanwhile she and Clytie see to the propriety of necessary burials, tend to Sutpen while he lives, keep their place "going," and finally (though this effort is mostly Clytie's) take responsibility for the last of the Sutpens, Charles Bon's idiot grandson, Jim. Though her part in the novel is a muted one, the story of Judith would reinforce the effect of that of her brother on Quentin's consciousness.

In the assessment of various influences on the protagonist of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* there remains the matter of Quentin and Thomas Sutpen himself. Sutpen is the inevitable figure of reference in any discussion of non-endurance or rebellion against man's limited and contingent status in the Faulknerian universe. From the first pages of this novel, in which the author pictures Quentin pondering Sutpen's part in the creation of his plantation in words reminiscent of those spoken by Jehovah in Genesis ("Be Sutpen's Hundred"), the

larger-than-life founder and destroyer of a dynasty is identified as an over-reacher. In the authoritative recitation by Quentin of the two-part explanation Sutpen gave of his life to General Compson (who in turn gave it to Jason III, who in turn gave it to his son) there are two quotations from Sutpen on which Quentin dwells: the first explains how Sutpen looked at the disposition of place and advantages in the world before the house-Negro sent him away from the front door of a plantation; the second indicates what change in his philosophy occurs after that experience. At least twice in the novel Quentin tells us that as a boy Sutpen believed that fate *and fate alone spawned* "some . . . in one place and some in another," gave some men a "fine rifle" and some nothing at all. This age-old and natural (but nevertheless contemptible) excuse of the shiftless for the little their shiftlessness brings them collapses on the boy when the Negro "insults" him. He retreats to a cave, reasons with himself, and then jumps from one half-truth to another. For, as he describes it later, Sutpen came that day to believe that a man makes his own fate: makes it (if he amounts to anything) to "shape itself to him like his clothes did." From excessive humility, "dreamy and destinationless locomotion . . . downhill," Sutpen turns to excessive pride; and we must remember that the formula in Faulkner for those who would avoid the furies is "pride *and* humility." Thirty years later, when his miscalculations have come back upon him and he goes to discuss them with General Compson, Sutpen is still describing his career as a study in the exercise of will. His talk of "choosing," in Chapter VII and elsewhere, as much as his deeds themselves, helps to keep Quentin's problem before the Compson boy and to aggravate it. It says to him that each man's past is for him inescapable, that will alone is not enough, but that the ability to exercise it is grand nonetheless. Finally, it is by way of empathizing with Henry, of feeling his way into Henry's situation (to which he repeatedly recurs after touching on others), that Quentin pursues the truth about his fellow compulsive and antitype. It is because Thomas Sutpen's motives must be understood if what befalls his children can be explained, and because only in the lives of his children does the meaning of his own come clear, that Quentin can respond to Shreve's "Tell [me] about the South" with the Sutpen story. For what the South means to Quentin (a young man locked up inside himself and therefore interested only in the application of whatever he learns to his own problems) and what Shreve will never understand is that *past is present.*

As the pattern of deed and consequence, father and son, the heavy-handed justice of a teleologically governed universe, is uncovered in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin Compson—at first slowly and casually (if reluctantly even then), and afterward (upon Shreve's urging in the last four chapters) with a great rush—moves into deeper and deeper involvement with the matter he is piecing together. When he begins, Quentin is seemingly unaware that the Sutpen legend is going to capture and reproach him; he submits, half-willingly, to the account Miss Rosa has summoned him to hear, to the speculations about various Sutpens which his report of the mysterious spinster's conversations elicits from his father, and to the first tentative empathic impulses which the two together (plus perhaps memories of other conversations with his father) inspire in him. The awareness of the importance *as well as* the "presence" of the past which his culture had given him would inevitably dispose the Compson heir to attend these narratives and venture these speculations, even before he begins to see himself in the Sutpen chronicle. The fury of Rosa Coldfield's "gothic thriller" and the almost equally compulsive quality of the recollections of the legend imposed on him by his father plant the seeds of his own later agonized ruminations upon the shape of one particular unit of Southern time. But he has to learn more about the Sutpens, have more time to dwell on them, and more of the difficulties which he finds mirrored in the painful choices forced upon the principals in their "history," before that history can really fall upon him with full purchase.

However, if what happens to Quentin and his family in the summer of 1909, especially Quentin's encounter with Henry at the end of that summer, has a bearing on how he behaves when he starts again on Sutpen with his roommate at Harvard, then the way his coworker in the heightened narrative of the last four chapters behaves has, as already suggested above, an even greater impact on his resumption of his private "Prometheus Bound." Only once or twice before the nocturnal dialogue of the last chapters does Quentin actually begin to protest against hearing more of (or again) the Sutpen story. After Shreve enters the novel and sets out to make of it what Olga Vickery calls a "romance" (and I believe she is correct in her choice of terms), Quentin protests repeatedly: "I have had to listen too long" . . . "too much too long." However, these protests are silent, inward, and unavailing. Quentin senses by the time Shreve really "starts in on him" that it is inevitable that he hear the tale over and over again.

In bending the story to suit his own ends and preconceptions (his objective would appear to be at once to satisfy curiosity, confirm prejudices, and receive amusement), McCannon makes it yet more painful to the Southern boy by narrowing even further and more exclusively (if inadvertently) its focus on the day of Charles Bon's death, the moment of "decision." Miss Rosa had a good bit about this day in her narrations; and Quentin's father seems to have had some impulse to circle round and round it as the centerpiece of his high tragedy. But Quentin himself, even before the story of Sutpen grew so to anguish him, was drawn to his first full imaginative penetrations of it at the end of Chapter IV and of Chaper V by events surrounding Charles's death. Perhaps he was even then disarmed by the display among the principals of its drama of the strength he lacked. And in the cold dark of his climactic encounter with self-engendered images of that strength, images born of obsessive reflection upon its time of testing, he finds that display unbearable. Because he will have his romantic melodrama, the Canadian designs much of his questioning and hypothesizing to illumine its most dramatic scene and to keep it before Quentin. He must do the latter if he is to have the former. In summary, Shreve encourages in Quentin the variety of indirect self-accusation which will, in the end (a few months later), destroy him. Most of the increased agitation of Quentin, as he and Shreve manipulate (Quentin already knows all of its details, Shreve most) and unfold the Sutpen saga, is evidence of the Northern boy's effectiveness (in both the rôle of bully and that of "stage manager") as an instrument of provocation—as is Quentin's frequent insistence that his friend sounds "just exactly like father."

Much of Quentin's steadily increasing discomfiture with the legends he is forced by Shreve to sift through one last time is rendered by information about him from the author in descriptions of his dress, his conduct, and his look as the evening's business progresses. Quentin is first "sullen," then becomes hot or even feverish while the room in which the dialogue occurs is too cold for a healthy Canadian, and is finally driven into convulsions and almost smothered by thinking on "Sutpen." Moreover, the image we get of his management of one side of a speculative dialectic from the pattern of these chapters reinforces the impression made on us by the more dramatic facets of his behavior as described in them by the novelist. He moves and speaks as if bemused or entranced, seems usually to address himself and not Shreve when he does speak, and retreats into his own ruminations at the slightest irritation; indeed, most of what we have from him in

these chapters is solipsistic. And even when he answers Shreve's questions (including the final one), he is often as much addressing himself as addressing his roommate: is anwering a question he puts to himself as soon (or as long) as his friend is asking him another. And always—in answering questions, in introspective retreat from questions, and in physical response to both—Quentin Compson's state of mind is explicable only in terms of his fascination with Henry Sutpen's agonizing decision, his "endurance" of his place: the event which he (Quentin) "can't pass."

The interior monologue assigned to Quentin early in Chapter VI, his first response to the interrogation which, with the letter from home about Miss Rosa's death, drives him back to the Sutpen legend, is a recollection of his trip out to the "Hundred" and discovery of his *doppelgänger* hiding there. But he is not ready to tell Shreve about Henry; what is noteworthy about this reverie is that it proves how much Quentin's involvement with Henry has increased since the late summer of Chapter V. It indicates that something has transpired in the interval—something that intensifies and aggravates the relationship of these two Southerners, something that makes Quentin reluctant to "find him" [Henry] again. As was argued above, to discover just what it was that occurred requires us to look outside *Absalom, Absalom!* That the passage does appear at this point, however, puts beyond question (especially when considered in the light of Quentin's subsequent behavior) the fact that Quentin in the winter of 1909–1910 is, in reaction to whatever has happened since the September before, much more inclined to see the Sutpen story as the story of Henry's dilemma. The reverie passage which stands near the beginning of Chapter VI connects and distinguishes the Quentin we see in the first five chapters with his behavior in the remainder of the novel. Shreve is apparently stimulated by the information in the letter to go over again with Quentin what he already, from earlier conversations, knows about the Sutpens. As he continues with this summary of what befell that family after the death of Charles, Quentin drifts away again to recall his first visit (with his father) to the Sutpen graveyard where Judith buried Bon. He is even yet hovering just beyond the figures of Henry and his adversary. However, while Shreve talks, Quentin apparently shares some of what is passing through his mind with the Canadian because (on page 215) their dialogue "picks up" without any shift in subject matter. Shortly thereafter Shreve inserts himself, says "Wait" to Quentin before he can begin to speak at length, and then gives way to hear in Chapter VII the story of General Compson's conversation

with the man who took him to be his only friend: a conversation concerning Sutpen's early days in Mississippi, his beginnings, his enterprise, and his puzzlement at failure. Shreve wants Quentin to wait because he wants to digest what he has learned thus far. He lights his pipe and then offers his half-defensive sarcasm about how fine the South is, " . . . better than the theatre." His remarks refer to his original question to Quentin at the beginning of Chapter VI; and, in some way (perhaps because of their irreverence), they get Compson back to answering that question. As Quentin proceeds, Shreve again indicates that he already knows much of this story; but he wants to hear Compson's version of it—in detail, with comment—so that he can "play a while," continue with his own private "Ben Hur." And the Southern boy's halting, often broken exposition stimulates Shreve's own dramaturgical impulses. Moreover, Quentin is glad to get away from Henry's part of the Sutpen saga and is also too Southern and too polite not to begin his compliance with Shreve's request for an explanation of the South and "how people live down there" without going back to the beginning. Nonetheless, as we might anticipate, that beginning will swing the focus back to Henry.

Quentin's speech is not at this point agitated; for the story of Thomas Sutpen does not (as noted earlier) profoundly engage his sympathies or threaten his self-respect. But after young Compson has finished with what he knows from his grandfather, Shreve is eager to help with the tale-telling and to organize the entire story; and, at the same time, Quentin becomes more reluctant to continue, especially after Shreve seizes on the word "design" as the heart of the pattern they are after. For with that word Quentin is brought directly back into involvement with the narrative, back to the thought that each man lives inside a continuum of deeds and their consequences set in motion before his birth, but becoming finally his own to face or fall before, despite his innocence of any responsibility for their inception. And the next word Shreve seizes is "children," a word which completes the reintroduction of Henry into the circuit of their speculations.

The last and most important reversion to the actual day of Bon's execution/suicide does not, however, occur until the end of Chapter VIII. We are nonetheless on our way toward this episode with a steady emotive and forensic acceleration from the moment when Shreve begins once more to function as co-narrator. First, he and Quentin excitedly rehearse Thomas Sutpen's management of Bon's appearance, his last visit with General Compson, his decision to let Henry settle with Bon, and his return home to a house to which he

knows Henry is lost; then they cover the "demon's" last days—his proposals (both) to Miss Rosa, his seduction of Milly, and his ignominious end. Shreve is now very eager for Quentin to slow down; but his roommate will have none of it. He seems to want to stop the questioning, and imagines that by finishing with the elder Sutpen he will end his conversation with Shreve. But instead of stopping him, the account of Thomas Sutpen's full life (including the ironic justice of its conclusion) and motives gives the "playful" roommate just what he needs to push on and "finish" the drama he has been trying to make all along. And after a pause (during which the novelist calls to our attention Quentin's increasing misery with it), the narrative is resumed with Shreve fully in charge.

Quentin has already suggested to the Canadian that he did learn something from his visit to the Sutpen mansion. He never says what. Perhaps he has tried to forget it; perhaps he intends to withhold it lest Shreve insist that they belabor its significance. Shreve, however, does not need anything from Quentin now, does not want anything. He is carried forward by the flow of his own creativity which seemingly "discovers" the blot on Bon's scutcheon *sans* assistance from anything or anyone external. He commences with Henry and his father, when, at the time of Henry's second visit home with the somewhat older fellow-student from New Orleans, the elder Sutpen tells him that his friend is also his brother. The protagonist of Shreve's story is most obviously Charles Bon, whose life he reconstructs with loving care. Though he does not indicate, as he begins Bon's story, that he is yet aware of his hero's Negro blood, he sentimentalizes from the start and makes of the Byronic and inscrutable young Latin a paragon of filial affection abused and true love denied. He even says, "And now . . . we're going to talk about love." Quentin knows that this word is, as Shreve intends it, beside the point in a discussion of Bon's behavior. He protests his friend's handling of the Sutpen story and defends Sutpen's acknowledged son. Moreover, when Henry begins to share with his half-brother the spotlight of McCannon's farrago and when the tempo and empathic purchase (for him) of the Northern boy's telling of it increases, Quentin gravitates back into the flow of his friend's florid monologue. The story Shreve is re-creating now is the story Quentin was thinking about all the time—but inverted so as to honor Bon instead of Henry. The extra push provided by the highly charged, near hypnotic quality of his roommate's rendering of Bon's life (before he and Henry have to settle their difference over Judith) and his condescension toward Henry only reinforce Quentin's already

strong inclination to dwell again on Sutpen's sons before the gate. The total pattern of Chapters VI, VII, and VIII may be said to have conspired to bring Quentin face-to-face once more with the measure of his own weakness. This time, the results of his empathizing exhaust and shatter him completely. How well Quentin is empitied by this last of his returns to the scene of Henry's act is conveyed to us by his submission, once he and Shreve return from their imaginative journey, to the idea that he had rejected repeatedly—that Bon died for love—and by his already remarked physical deterioration at the beginning of Chapter IX.

After pushing on to the discovery of Bon's Negro blood (perhaps Quentin reveals it, perhaps Shreve conjectures the truth) and the dialogue between the two brother/enemies which McCannon imagines its revelation would have engendered, Shreve is himself a little spent and ready to pause again. Moreover, he is momentarily alarmed (as Chapter IX begins) by what his "game" is doing to Quentin. Out of concern and honest puzzlement he relents and withdraws the pressure which he has applied so unswervingly to his friend. He confesses that he finds the South incomprehensible and asks the first genuine question he has put to the Mississippian during the evening's discussion. Moreover, he prefaces his inquiry with a gesture of intelligence, a tacit acknowledgment that whatever the South is or means can be explained only with reference to history. He admits (with an additional display of irreverence, this time not malicious) that the past is in no sense "present" for his people, that it imposes on them no thought of burdens to be borne or obligations to be fulfilled, no awareness of the mysterious incorporation of the living with the dead and yet unborn. In reacting to the baldness of Shreve's well-intended and serious but still obtuse query, Quentin defends himself with the only answer a traditional person can give to such a question coming from someone with the Canadian boy's background: "You can't understand it. You would have to be born there." Despite his temporary reformation and open-mindedness, Shreve deserves the stock response of the harried Southerner to this all-too-familiar question. For he is asking it a little too late—in the wrong context. But, just or not, from Quentin he will not accept anything so pat; he knows the young escapist too well, has been listening to him too carefully. We must remember what has just occurred in the last pages of Chapter VIII before we judge Shreve's rejection of Quentin's answer too harshly. They have shared too much for McCannon to quit without extracting from his roommate his solution to the problems

Quentin has formulated for him. And therefore he says to Compson's evasion the most perceptive words we are to get from him in *Absalom, Absalom!*: "Would I then? . . . Do you understand it?" Quentin mutters, "I don't know"; and then, as if to explain why he is yet uncertain about what it means to be born with an "entailed birthright," why he is yet unable to "pass" Henry and Charles and the pistol and in what context he has tried to resolve these questions for himself, young Compson finally tells the story of his meeting with Henry Sutpen and his discovery of how high may be the cost of endurance. With that meeting, Shreve's question, the novel's question, ceases to be abstract and speculative to Quentin. And he is, as the sequence of events in this section of the novel clearly infers, now unable to answer that question *because* it has acquired for him a weighty personal significance.

Shreve is only reacting naturally to Quentin's just completed narrative *cum* explanation (Chapter VIII) in starting once more, but with greater emphasis, his tell-me-about-the-South; and in replying, with the story he has tried to withhold, to the uncertainty brought on by the less painful narrative which preceded it—a narrative which was offered in response to a milder form of the same question—young Compson is behaving in a manner utterly consistent with the character established for him in the rest of the novel and in *The Sound and the Fury*. As Shreve finally discovers, Quentin cannot answer his question, not even its adjunct concerning why Miss Rosa was so determined to visit the Sutpen place in the summer of 1909. All that he can do is to repeat, indicate the context in which he (as a Southerner) knows an answer may be discovered, point toward and probe the event and person which and whom he would have to penetrate to find an answer.

The blond and sanguine inquisitor is left still unsatisfied by Quentin's last (and rather eerie) recitation, especially since Quentin has remained unable or unwilling to touch directly on what the elderly Henry Sutpen said to him—why he slew his half-brother and what the cost of his choice has been. As an ahistorical being, he is incapable of comprehending why Quentin will not finally answer him. And perhaps for that reason his sympathies again recede from his exasperating companion, and the briefly interrupted tone of levity returns to his remarks. Yet he has learned one thing from Quentin's anguished evasions. There is something strained and imperfect about the Mississippian's relation to the place and world to which he belongs. Shreve's last question is, as was insisted above, imperceptive;

it indicates that *no* valid answer Quentin could have offered the Canadian would have given him the understanding he seeks. Shreve is, save for the moment discussed above (which Faulkner uses to humanize him *and* to prepare him for the novel's end), the impenitent futurist, a provincial in time.

Quentin's almost hysterical response to Shreve's ultimate inquiry certifies (and in so doing sums up what his characterization throughout *Absalom, Absalom!* has been telling us) that it does belong, is not irrelevant. Rather, it is a token of how very like the *persona* in Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" young Compson is. Though penitent, and aware that something is flawed in his own relation to *his* history, he can imagine no better cure for his ills than to "set up the grave in the house"—or commit suicide (an external traditionalism and its most likely consequence). Contrary to what is indicated to Shreve by his refusal to explain anything about his homeland but the turmoil it stirs in him, Quentin does not hate the South; but he cannot abide what his own narrative efforts indicate that it means to be a Southerner, to be marked by an inherited personal connection, place, and family: caught in such a way that he must respond or be smothered. Therefore, Quentin protests too much that he does not hate *his* South, *his* burden, *his* "nevermore of peace." His reiterated insistence that Shreve has misread his behavior persuades us that the Canadian was partially correct. But it should also, when considered together with everything else we learn about Quentin in the novel (and especially his general weakness and shame at that weakness), convince us that it is *Compson* who is measured by its recurrence and *not the South or its history.*

The thematic and formal implications of the fact that Shreve's last question is about Quentin, not about the South, are enormous. As noted above, the Mississippian has been the topic and subject of interrogation all along. The Canadian and all of his kind, past and present, who put loaded questions about the South to Southerners, are always more interested in the latter and in that curiosity, the "Southern mind." Indeed, if Shreve is really interested in anything but his "play" (which he has for the most part finished at the end of Chapter VIII) and a little sport with his "curious" roommate at bay, there is some indication that he has realized he *can* learn about a Southerner. In this enterprise he partially succeeds. The critics of *Absalom, Absalom!* should do likewise—without confusing the one (the assumptions held in common by most Southerners) with the other (what one of their number chooses to do—be he Compson or Sutpen).

Quentin rejects the social or familial implications of Faulkner's doctrine of nature or "endurance" and is therefore, secondarily, also in rebellion against the Providence that made him a man, a Southerner, and a Compson. His is the passive presumption which leaves to feckless men the governance of those affairs which are properly his business. On the fulcrum of pride/humility, he leans toward the latter and undermines community in a purely negative fashion. The result of his cowardice and dramatically acknowledged desire to be "free" of his heritage is like Isaac McCaslin's less despicable but no less erroneous "heroic resignation": a harmful vacuum. Sutpen, Quentin's antitype, is also antisocial and a poor "steward of his place"; but he is, first of all, Promethean, one of the proud—an aggressive, metaphysical (or, more narrowly, ontological) rebel. He produces not a vacuum, but a wound. These paired horrors are, in summary, Faulkner's projection of what ails the post-bellum South and the larger world it typifies. In *Absalom, Absalom!* these two, and the three Sutpen children, explore in depth what it means to endure or not to endure. No other Faulkner novel deals with this theme more exhaustively or is less comprehensible apart from it. And none other is in its use of a young gentleman in relation to that theme more difficult to unravel. If we do not care for Faulkner's ethic of endurance or the pre-modern, submissive ontology upon which it rests, if we are impatient with the subtleties of his craft, we are at liberty to manufacture out of incidental and melodramatic features of the book a novel we would like him to have written. But as we do so, we will make Sutpens and Quentins of ourselves—without altering or reducing the majesty of truth and design in the novel we abuse.

NOTES

1. "Endurance" is that balance of "pride and humility" which results in "coping". Faulkner's use of these terms is reiterative. They suggest the ontological ground of his version of natural law. Fatalism is mere passivity; simple pride, unalloyed by a comprehension of natural limitations, is the old error of Satan. Both are violations of place and destructive of community.

On *Absalom, Absalom!* there is an uninterrupted history of violent critical dispute. See Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 295–324; 424–443. Also Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 150–64; C. Hugh Holman, "*Absalom, Absalom!*: The Historian as Detective," *Sewanee Review*, 79 (Fall 1971): 542–53; John W. Hunt, *William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1964), pp. 101–36; Donald M. Kartiganer "Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*: The Discovery of Values," *American Literature*, 31

(November 1965): 291–306; Cleanth Brooks, "The Narrative Structure of *Absalom, Absalom!*," *Georgia Review*, 29 (Summer 1975): 366–94; John W. Hunt, "Keeping the Hoop Skirts Out: Historiography in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*," *Faulkner Studies*, (Coral Gables: University of Miami, Department of English, 1980), ed. Barnett Guttenburg, pp. 38–47.

The great question developed in the commentary on *Absalom, Absalom!* concerns the role of Thomas Sutpen in the structure of the novel and his status as either an anomaly among the great planters of Yoknapatawpha or a representative of that class of men.

Certain Ladies of Quality: Faulkner's View of Women and the Evidence of "There Was a Queen"

William Faulkner's attitude toward women and his conception of their proper place and function in a social order is a much worried question. It has elicited the attention or malice (or both) of his most energetic commentators. Unfortunately, the better part of the discussion it has received has been as imperceptive or downright wrongheaded as the treatment given (often by the same critics) to Isaac McCaslin, Thomas Sutpen, or the Yoknapatawpha Negroes. The cause of this confusion is not, however, obscure or unexpected; for, as we would anticipate, most Faulkner critics as part of these "enlightened" times find the idea of place repugnant and that of role foreign to the ethos of an "open society." And this generalization, with feminism as one of the stronger subspecies of our enlightenment, is especially true of any theory of the place and role of women. Without both, of course, the thematic substance of his Cycle, the concept of "endurance," and the doctrine of nature of which it is the cornerstone are, as they apply to women in the community, unintelligible; and it is within the framework of that doctrine and with reference to that role that women in the Mississippi novelist's fiction are here to be considered. The treatment must, in its reference to particular stories, appear most sparing. My focus is, despite the ambitious title, in fact on one tale only—or rather on one story and related sections of other Faulkner fictions which give to it *solus* an especially representative and summary quality. Such selectivity is not only desirable (for reasons of economy) but also necessary; for we are overwhelmed with evidence! Faulkner is never long silent concerning the ladies. Wherefore, chosen

emphasis notwithstanding, this discussion of the "horizontal" or social implications of women's practice or avoidance of the appropriate business of their sex, endurance or failure to endure, makes some claim to be in scope—thanks to the value of my one example as an epitome—considerable. For gender, as one of the inescapable attributes of the particular condition imposed upon every mortal by the working of a mysterious and inscrutable providence, carries with it more obvious social implications for women than for men. Endurance of (or failure to endure) their assignment is more directly the issue faced by this novelist's female characters than is "vertical" endurance, conscious affirmation of and submission to (or denial of and rebellion against) an "assigner." Self-definition is, for them, social definition. Society is, at bottom, what they make of it.[1]

Faulkner especially admired older women—and most particularly women born well before the turn of the century. His young women, if they are "modern," rarely come out well. They belong to a generation perpetually "between twenty and forty," to the age group by whom all "the world's anguish is caused."[2] Self-realization is their hue and cry. Maggie Mallison, Gavin Stevens's sister (*Intruder in the Dust*, *Knight's Gambit*, *Requiem for a Nun*, *The Town*, and *The Mansion*); Margaret Powers (*Soldiers' Pay*); Lucy Pate Houston (*The Hamlet*); perhaps the ladies of the Priest family (*The Reivers*); and country women, both black and white, such as Mrs. Grier ("Two Soldiers" and "Shall Not Perish"); Mannie Rider ("Pantaloon in Black"); Mrs. Littlejohn (*The Hamlet* and *The Town*); Mrs. Armisted (*Light in August*); and Mrs. Wallstreet Panic Snopes (*The Hamlet* and *The Town*) are exceptions—as are a few lesser figures. But it is to the women who followed after, gave themselves to and sustained, an older social ideal, that of the family and clan culture of the old South, to whom he looks for a norm. As Cleanth Brooks puts it, Faulkner's feelings about the role of women are "old-fashioned."[3] They seem to owe much to the experiences and recollections of the novelist's youth and to observations of more recent developments rather than to any contrived illiberality or misogyny.[4] They are, in a word, traditional: part of his inheritance as a Southerner of his class and generation. And they have their fruition and totem in the matriarchs, the custodians of the civilized life so well represented as a type in the Yoknapatawpha Cycle: Granny Millard (in *The Unvanquished*), Miss Habersham (in *Intruder in the Dust*, called Miss Worsham in *Go Down, Moses*), Judith Sutpen (in *Absalom, Absalom!*); and especially Miss Jenny Du Pre.[5]

Professor Brooks has given us convincing evidence of Faulkner's attachment to the idea of community.[6] And women are, to repeat, natural keepers of community and of its vehicle, the family. Instinctively, they fulfill themselves through their perpetuation of these two institutions. Because of their readiness to "endure" a biologically determined function as mothers, homebuilders, and checks on male "notions," Faulkner prefers the women of an earlier South to his female contemporaries. The latter are fallen by the way to the extent that they have imbibed from the spirit of their times a more "emancipated" view of their condition and are thus transformed into "imitation" men: mere sexual objects, burdens, or decorations. True, little of his hostility to feminism is overtly stated; it is dramatized—implicit in the contrasting portraits of modern and old-fashioned women which dot his pages. But it is self-evident and consistent with the rest of his social thinking and general world-view. To rehearse what I have argued of the subject elsewhere, each person, age, occupation, or even each class has according to Faulkner an *a priori*, by definition, role in the human family which is community. The good of all and each depends upon the performance by each and all of his or her own role—and coincidence may expand or contract that role at particular moments.[7] Such endurance is a hard teaching. We would expect contemporary characters to ignore it—and contemporary critics to deny its fictional validation. Even the few modern women (or girls) in Faulkner who do seem to understand what role they are stewards of are obvious anachronisms. For a time in their youth, they may possibly resemble their eternally girlish sisters. A little foolishness, usually done in the name of romance, is the natural right of all young women: a little *mad* dreaming of vicarious fulfillment through a boyish hero or even through some action of the sort which has its natural provenance with men. Moreover, the experience helps reinforce in them another, more productive, and useful natural inclination. Throughout their lives they will, by right of kind, share with all of Faulkner's females an affinity with and an understanding of the world's body—things earthly, instinctive, or even evil—and an immunity to the viruses of ideology. Because these last have in this day become more numerous and insidious, some initiation into them may now be necessary—even to women. Nonetheless, with the appearance of children (their own or their family's—or even their society's), self-assertion, notions, daydreams, foolishness, and girlhood—all must be put away.[8]

Woman's role is, in this concept, both passive and preservative; and that of men is active and creative. Faulkner knew that he would be misunderstood in this matter as in others. In interviews he repeatedly attempted to protect his work. For mere fiction cannot, he recognized, withstand the ingenious rigidities and iron formulations now brought to bear upon it. In response to a suggestion that he despised women *per se* and in explanation of his conservative attitudes concerning their genuine importance, he told a Japanese audience:

> I think that as fine an influence as any young man can have is one reasonable old woman to listen to . . . because they are much more sensible than men, they have to be. They have held families together and it's because of families a race is continued.[9]

Of course, Faulkner's non-enduring females are not all moderns any more than his gentlewomen are all ante-bellum matriarchs of quality; but the preceding description of the difference between generations and concomitant evaluation of the merits and weaknesses of each is, to repeat once more, sustained by the body of his fictional achievement; and it is nowhere made plainer than in his admirable and ill-treated short story, "There Was a Queen."[10]

Miss Jenny Du Pre is the protagonist in this work and the queen of its title. She appears in more of Faulkner's stories than any other representative of her sex. At the time of "There Was a Queen" she is past ninety and has for almost sixty years superintended life in the household to which she came a young widow in 1869. Strong but gentle, high-minded and self-sacrificing but undeluded by the vainglories of the men of her family, she is more than anyone else to be credited with the perpetuation of both her clan and the idea of Sartoris. And with that idea, as opposed to some measures chosen for its implementation by Sartoris men, she never quarrels.[11] Even the most foolish of its champions commands her loyalty—as we can see, to the death and beyond. For it is an idea which provides her with a place and secures her dignity therein. Her antagonist, Narcissa Benbow Sartoris, the wife of her nephew's grandson, Bayard Sartoris III, is not so obviously modern as Temple Drake (*Sanctuary*), Cecily Saunders (*Soldiers' Pay*), Charlotte Rittenmeyer ("Wild Palms"), Elly (in the story of that title), or Laverne Shumann (*Pylon*). Even so, Narcissa is self-preoccupied and self-possessed. Some twelve years earlier she had fallen in love with Bayard Sartoris, almost against her will. But she hates all men, not because (as Miss Jenny recognizes all too well) they are boys and mad fools whose perversities cannot be predicted or compulsions explained, but rather because they constitute a threat to

her form of modernity, a dreamy self-absorption. She is like Allen Tate's Alice ("The Last Days of Alice"),[12] cut off from nature in a self-created and self-maintained world of inviolate illusion.[13] And the child which Bayard's suicidal death in the plane crash left to her care she intends to envelop in that cowardly, solipsistic world. She refuses (after first agreeing) to give him a Sartoris name ("John" is Miss Jenny's suggestion and what *she* persists in calling him) and uses instead "Benbow" after her family—respectable though never landed folk, apparently (and predictably, because of their beginnings, their lack of place) enervated by the very malady which afflicts her.

"There Was a Queen" is in one sense a sequel to accounts of the history of the Sartoris clan and of Miss Jenny's relationship to Narcissa given in *Sartoris* and in *Sanctuary*. Narcissa is (by and large) the same person in the short story that she was in the novels, as is (entirely) Miss Jenny.[14] But as Elnora (Miss Jenny's mulatto counterpart, her housekeeper, friend, and kinswoman) observes, Virginia Du Pre never really knows Narcissa for what she is, or at least not until Miss Jenny and Narcissa have finished their last conversation. Her trouble is, to quote the undeceived Negress, "quality can't see that trash is trash or how it goes about working in with quality, because it is quality" (p. 734). Miss Jenny presupposes the presence of a certain virtue and strength in her great-great nephew's wife because Narcissa is now a Sartoris and the mother of a Sartoris and because she came to that estate by choice, knowing it entailed special obligations. Moreover, she has refused to change that state by remarriage—has refused even after Miss Jenny advised her to remarry. The chatelaine is not accustomed to people of her own kind who have chosen to belong to it (and she knows that it is always partly a matter of choice) appearing to be what they are not. Narcissa is not an obvious climber; her motives in becoming a Sartoris are not so simple as Elnora implies—indeed, are not clear to Narcissa herself. Miss Jenny has had nothing in her experience with all varieties of women to prepare her for the peculiarly "modern" Narcissa, imagines that the girl has the willpower to act the part of a grown woman and a lady because she seems to have picked that role for herself with her chosen husband. She is, as Elnora anticipates, in for a terrible disillusionment.

Narcissa Benbow first began to visit the Sartoris house regularly and to become familiar with its lady while young Bayard was in France during the First World War. Miss Jenny received her amiably and tolerantly, recognizing that the girl was interested in her great-great nephew long before Narcissa did so herself. All these incidents

are chronicled in *Sartoris*, as are Narcissa's original reception of and reaction to the anonymous and obscene love letters which occasion all the trouble in "There Was a Queen." Byron Snopes, a clerk in the Sartoris bank, is the author of these letters. Narcissa tells Aunt Jenny about them and shows one to the older woman soon after the series commences. Miss Jenny is not surprised by the content of the letter, but suggests that Narcissa turn the matter over to the Colonel for a proper redress and then forget about it. When the Benbow girl refuses to take her advice, her hostess quickly ascertains part of the motivation of her behavior and hesitates to believe her guest's glib vow that she will burn the vile *billets-doux*, saying with "cold irony, 'Of course, you'll throw 'em right in the stove' " (*Sartoris*, p. 80). Yet she makes little of Narcissa's fascination with the letters, shrugging it off with, "I ain't twenty-six years old." Years before, on the day when her nephew faced down his father's killer without a pistol, she had told him of the special capacity of "small boys or fool young women" for self-delusion (*The Unvanquished*, p. 281). In the same spirit she can now write off Narcissa's self-deceiving pleasure in receiving love letters as an outgrowth of a tendency to romantic daydreams. But because Miss Jenny is a lady, she does not suspect that the Benbow girl's only objection to the letters is that someone else might read them and know that she has kept them and that she has made a man desire her, has enjoyed the thought that she might do so—or that they (the letters) might intrude life upon her too forcibly or too far. Narcissa enjoys playing with the idea of being a woman, so long as she is not committed to that role.[15] She comforts herself with the fact that nothing has actually happened (*Sartoris*, pp. 32–42) even though, as Mrs. Vickery insists, "her acceptance of fresh letters and her treasuring of them constitute definite though secret acts."[16] And already it is apparent that she defines respectability as a matter of "acting."[17] From this time the dimensions of her conflict with Miss Jenny and of the larger conflict which Faulkner develops through his treatment of the two women are established. Narcissa as Bayard's wife is never woman enough for him. She will not share with him the anguish of his guilt over his brother's death in combat or hear out his account of the day when that event occurred—an account which he has offered to share with no one else, an account which anyone who would reach him must hear and empathize with. She lacks those elemental qualities, the tenacity and affinity for things natural and for the main business of this old earth which she would need in order to pull her husband out of his guilt, mania and hunger for release from "dishonor" in expiatory

death—lacks the vital qualities in relationship to her husband which Faulkner's generally admirable women (and many of their strong and wicked sisters) possess. To her marriage Narcissa brings nothing that could hold Bayard, anchor him in the steady rhythm of life. Though she has unconsciously angled for months for a proposal of marriage, she finally submits to the engagement after a wild car ride in a moment of "surrender" (*Sartoris*, pp. 262–63). This scene and much else in her conduct as it appears in *Sartoris* imply that she is incapable of a normal love response—perhaps because she will not admit that she has, and therefore can control responsibly, a sexual or emotional nature. Or else, and this conjecture is more probable, she is afraid of love, afraid of life and of the exactions it could impose upon her: afraid, not as a normally timid and innocent girl would be but, finally, with an obsessive ruthlessness.[18] She brings to her marriage nothing of Miss Jenny's will to live. She (even though it is Bayard's manliness that attracts her) wants for a husband another Horace, her brother to whom she is unhealthily attached: a shelter from, not a hold on, life. She attempts to push Bayard in that direction, to make him "behave." And after a feeble attempt at meeting him halfway, epitomized in a hunting episode (*Sartoris*, pp. 28–29), preceded and followed by much talk of making Bayard "promise," she gives her husband up even before he causes his grandfather's death and flees from Mississippi to die in an Ohio plane crash.[19] She seems unperturbed and almost relieved when news of his death comes back; and (as was indicated above) her return in widowhood to the narcissism which Bayard had temporarily interrupted is indicated by the name she gives to their son. She will have no more Sartorises, no more of life. To Miss Jenny's demur that Sartoris will ever be Sartoris, Narcissa smiles "dreamily, with serene . . . detachment" (*Sartoris*, p. 380). Miss Jenny takes all of this to be numbness and defensive reaction to a wound of the heart. She never comprehends the peculiarities of the marriage her great-great nephew's crash had concluded.

Narcissa is next aroused from her idyll by her brother's departure from the Benbow pattern in *Sanctuary*. Horace, in this novel a weak prototype of Faulkner's later lawyer-hero, Gavin Stevens, has, since his days of *fin de siècle* melancholy, glass blowing, and awkward adultery, come free of his old ennui and facile defeatism to act the man. He has left the wife he stole from Harry Mitchell and the obnoxious nymphette daughter he acquired in the bargain to return to Jefferson and the family home. And, because no one else seems interested in him (and because he has inadvertently become involved

in his difficulties), he has undertaken the defense of Ruby Goodwin's common-law bootlegger husband. His sister is horrified, especially when he takes Ruby into his house; and then, thinking better of this first arrangement, he sets her up in a local hotel. This pleases his sister little more. Narcissa's objections to her brother's conduct are simple: Horace's actions endanger her respectability. They may require of her that she again endure some of the involvement with the world that for her had ended with Bayard's death. Miss Jenny thinks that Horace has been foolish in running away from marriage and in playing Quixote without necessary information. But she makes it plain that she does not share Narcissa's view of his legal affairs in Jefferson. However, she does understand why Narcissa is upset. The old woman explains to Horace his sister's vehemence about his involvement with the bootlegger and his family: "Do you think Narcissa'd want anybody to know that any of her folks could know people that would do anything as natural as make love or rob or steal?" (*Sanctuary*, p. 115) These observations confirm that Miss Jenny has gone beyond her evaluation of Narcissa in *Sartoris*, has detected in the girl a tendency toward self-deception and self-disguise; and they are accurate as far as they go. But they do not begin to apprehend the depths of Narcissa's narcissism.

Shortly before the old woman asks her rhetorical question, Narcissa gets Ruby put out of the hotel. Then this loving sister goes to the district attorney (Eustace Graham) with secret information about where Temple Drake is hiding and sees to it that her brother will not win his case—in effect, sees to it that Lee Goodwin will die. After frustrating his efforts in behalf of justice, she sends Horace back to a wife she openly despises in precisely the same spirit that she subsequently besmirches the name of Sartoris in "There Was a Queen." Respectability is necessary to the preservation of her half-world of white dresses and shelter from "nature" (to use Miss Jenny's term) or reality. In the concluding chapters of *Sanctuary* Miss Jenny again learns how far, to what extremes, Narcissa will go to preserve "honor," as she understands the word: what she will permit herself to do to avoid accommodating to the body of the world, admitting finitude. But the final lesson is still to come—and soon.

The other accounts scattered throughout the cycle of the events which have already occurred in the life of Virginia Du Pre before the time of "There Was a Queen" are inferentially present in that story. The old woman's death is an epitome of her life and a solemn judgment upon the world she chooses to leave in its conclusion, the world

personified by Narcissa Benbow Sartoris. The story is beautifully structured; conversations among the Sartoris Negroes, authorial narration, and brief descriptions of the activities of Narcissa which precede and follow it frame the women's encounter in the library and focus the reader's attention on that moment while they illuminate its meaning. Our perspective on the afternoon's happening is Elnora's. When he made her a Sartoris mulatto, Faulkner converted the crotchety old Negress into a female Lucas Beauchamp, a peculiarly prescient and judicious spokesman or representative of her white family.[20] As was suggested earlier, Elnora's voice has a normative and choric function here. At this late date (*circa* 1930) in Miss Jenny's life, Elnora alone of all the members of this depleted household understands what it is which that life has been about and what a threat Narcissa has brought into it. Elnora sees right through Narcissa's disguises; the younger woman is to her simply "town trash" (p. 729), a rootless, placeless bit of ephemera. As the story opens, the former Miss Benbow has just returned to the Sartoris home after a mysterious three-day trip to Memphis. Elnora anticipates that her reappearance will bring great pain to her mistress, a mistress whom she serves with the fiercely possessive, proprietary spirit of the old-time family Negro: "It's a Sartoris job," she says (p. 728). After the titular lady of the house (for Narcissa is now *the* Mrs. Sartoris) gathers up her son and heads out across the pasture, Elnora's anxiety for Miss Jenny intensifies and breaks forth into verbal expression, first to herself, then to Miss Jenny, and finally to her son and daughter, Isom and Saddie—an expression which also testifies to the faith the two older women share and embodies a sharp comment on its temporarily absent antagonist.

First while alone on her way to the big house from her cabin and then while about her small tasks of the early afternoon, Elnora mulls over to herself the implications of Narcissa's just-concluded absence, about some of which she is puzzled. To repeat, she assumes the responsibility for Miss Jenny's care, both physical and spiritual, even when she is not told to do so. But as the old Negress recognizes, it is not "fitten" that Narcissa should have left her elderly kinswoman by marriage with "nobody but niggers to look after her" (p. 729). She is distressed to think of Miss Jenny's sensibilities exposed to the improprieties that trash will perform, not with the thought that she herself will be incapable of performing what is needful. However, Elnora is, at this point, most of all concerned about the overtones of

the mysterious trip, overtones which she has yet to fathom. She is not surprised at any indecorum from Narcissa and merely grunts when she is later told that the younger woman and Bory are still in the pasture. And when she goes into the library where Miss Jenny sits facing her cape jasmine through the window framed by the colored glass from Carolina, Elnora discovers that her mistress shares her anxiety about Narcissa's peculiar behavior. They exchange a few words which suggest their intimacy and shared perspective. Elnora is blunt about her contempt for the subject of their conversation. Miss Jenny does not argue with her description of Narcissa as a lazy woman; and after trying to assure herself (aloud) that the young Mrs. Sartoris will be improved by the name she bears, she gives silent assent to the Negress's "She won't never be a Sartoris woman" (p. 730). Elnora declines to answer Miss Jenny's question about why mother and son went to the creek. Finally, as this scene (and Part I) of the story closes, we are presented with the tableau of the two real Sartoris women watching silently as evening fills the garden (itself an objectification of the old order) through which Narcissa and her son finally approach the house.

Part II of "There Was a Queen" (pp. 731–34) is made up entirely of Elnora's dialogue with her children as she prepares the evening meal. It proceeds organically out of the tension established in Part I and illuminates the implications of that conflict. Its subject is the true nature of quality or gentility, what constitutes or makes a gentlewoman or lady—and what does not; and therefore it contains the plainest indication of its theme to be ascertained in the story and the key to the meaning of the climax of the action which follows. The episode is dramatically effective because Saddie and Isom are, unlike their mother, outsiders to the world of Sartoris: among their own people muted counterparts of Narcissa in their confusion of values. Perhaps it is because they are young; perhaps it is because they suffer from the general decline in character and the will to endure which infects the more recent and especially twentieth-century generations in Faulkner's fiction.[21] In any case, Saddie and Isom see nothing to distinguish Miss Jenny's "quality" from Narcissa's "respectability." Their imperceptiveness provides the occasion for Elnora's memorable "born Sartoris or born quality of any kind aint is, it's does" (p. 732).[22]

The kitchen conversation between the elderly black woman and her children begins on a humorous note (which in itself should be a signal to those well read in Faulkner that he is about to speak plainly concerning matters of great weight). It is set in motion by the children's

puzzlement with Elnora's perturbation. Because they go by appearances, dwell among shadows, the younger Negroes see nothing wrong between Miss Jenny and her kinswoman-by-marriage, detect no tension in the household, and therefore misunderstand their mother's reflections on the "blood" of their younger mistress. The transition from "blood" and breeding to "quality" is an easy one. When Isom asserts, "You and Miss Jenny think aint nobody been born since Miss Jenny," Elnora quickly responds, "Who is been?" (p. 732) and then adds that, *because* she is quality (endures circumstances, deals with what is given, and is one in spirit and appearance), Miss Jenny does not complain of the wife of her great-great nephew. Elnora, to make final her judgment on Isom's stupidity, concludes: "Because Miss Jenny quality . . . and that's something you don't know nothing about, because you born too late to see any of it except her." And what her son had not seen—the difference between status as protective coloration and status as function, mere respectability and stewardship—she then illustrates with a pointed summary of Miss Jenny's biography, her trials both during the War Between the States and after, her determined confrontation of all manner of bereavement and deprivation, without the ordinary feminine luxury of tears, her *hegira* from Carolina (once her immediate family and hence her role there had been destroyed) to her brother's household in north Mississippi, and her persistence in both settings in the character required of her by her station. The legend, for it has assumed mythic and emblematic proportions with the passage of years, is supposed to explain to Elnora's children why Miss Jenny can be deceived and misused by the likes of Narcissa. But they (the children) again prove that they belong to an uncivil breed for whom legends have no significance when they see in their mother's account nothing but errors of fact concerning the distance from Jefferson to South Carolina and the contradiction of her much reiterated indifference to Narcissa's action, her usual insistence that Miss Jenny, as Isom recalls her words, "never need nobody but you to take care of her" (pp. 733–34). With this compounding of imperception Elnora's side of the conversation ceases to be inflectionless and turns harsh and disparaging. She expands upon the character she has drawn of Narcissa in Part I of the story. The girl has, she believes, "worked on" Miss Jenny, pretended to be what she was not, maneuvered her way into the protective cocoon of "Sartoris" through Miss Jenny, Bayard, and Bory, and is not about to fail to return to the refuge she finds in the respectability of her situation in the Sartoris household. Gentility is, in a word, an escape or disguise for Narcissa,

as Elnora understands her. The girl has not earned her place. The old Negress may detect more conscious malice in the early conduct of her younger mistress than the rest of Narcissa's story in the Yoknapatawpha series seems to bear out. But her comparison of the principles which take shape in the lives of the two white women, especially after the death of Bayard Sartoris III, holds up and answers questions raised at the beginning of this section of "There Was a Queen."

Elnora, as her preparation of the evening meal indicates, is concerned for the well-being ("needings") of Miss Virginia Du Pre. But her anxiety reaches out beyond the issue of what will become of one ninety-year-old lady of quality to the fate of the entire family which she too has lived only to sustain. Isom asks whether, if Narcissa is trash, her son should be likewise denominated. And with the question he touches upon his mother's deepest fear, that the Sartorises who have gone before shall have lived in vain, that their dream which was not "just Sartoris" shall have come to nothing.

> "Needings," she said. "It ain't Bory's needings and it ain't her needings, it's dead folks' needings. Old Marse John's and Cunnel's and Mister John's and Bayard that's dead and can't do nothing about it. That's where the needings is. That's what I'm talking about." (p. 734)

Through management of the dramatic potential of this scene—given the attitude of most contemporary readers—Faulkner again shows himself to be the conscious craftsman, putting especially traditionalist sentiments in the mouth of a Negress. This strategy has always been a commonplace one among Southern writers with a conservative bent. No improvement could be made on Faulkner's management of the exchange. The reference to Bory is to the point of this kitchen conversation because it raises the question of family honor in connection with family continuity (and for Faulkner, we must remember, the two are inseparable). At the same time it prepares the reader for Part III.

With the conclusion of the dialogue with Elnora and her children, the scene of "There Was a Queen" shifts abruptly back to the library where Jenny Du Pre sits alone, awaiting some explanation of the just-concluded visit to the creek and of Narcissa's earlier trip to Memphis. The transition between the sections is here again thematic, not narrative. The tensions in which the story is grounded sustain its flow across the gap. Part III (pp. 734–42) commences, as Part II concludes, with reference to Bory, the repository of Miss Jenny's hopes of any afterlife for Sartoris (the idea and the fact). We are informed that

"it was the boy [Bory] who told her [Miss Jenny]" (p. 734)—revealed to her that he and his mother had been sitting in the water—and thus forewarned her, though he himself understood nothing of what had transpired, of the darker revelations yet to come. Since coming to their house Miss Jenny has lived her life for the Sartoris men, has done so because, as she sees it, this was her duty, her place. Bory is the last of her charges and, finally, the object of her contention with Narcissa. Again, at this point as in Parts I and II of this story, the plants in the garden beneath the library window and the colored glass panes in that window through which the old woman meditates upon them move into the scene to play a part in its action. They are the potent symbols of what their owner has lived for and expects Bory to perpetuate beyond her death, a certain quality or unbought grace of life which is more than ornamental or "merely" beautiful, a gracious and self-sufficient superiority to the caprice of fortune which secures itself intact as it functions to give local habitation to the Sartoris dream of community. Miss Jenny takes comfort from the cape jasmine and elegant glass panes. Whenever she is beset by troubles, their look is reassuring. They objectify what she has accomplished with her life, the maintenance of a willed continuity from South Carolina and Virginia to the West, a continuity that binds up the private exertions of Miss Jenny and those of all her kind from the South's colonial beginnings eastward on into the semi-frontier atmosphere of Mississippi, and (if our suggestions may be extended still further) links all of these ladies in their civilization and order-bringing errand into the wilderness. Together they indicate the validity and the vitality of her tradition, the perseverance of the past in her person.[23] Faulkner's dwelling upon them is not coincidental or mere Southern window dressing and sentimentality; it is functional: like much else in his fiction, an employment, for the most serious purposes, of a familiar facet of the life he knows best. The role of the jasmine in Part III of "There Was a Queen" is particularly substantial and evocative. It especially helps to sustain the reader's focus on Bory and on Bory's fate, the most significant question before the household—and on the definition of quality established heretofore by Elnora as that definition bears upon the nurture of the very mutable but "sweet-smelling" plant, civil order (i.e., the "garden"), whose instrument Bory is supposed to become. In effect, Bory and the jasmine are, for Miss Jenny, homologous.[24]

Before Bory comes down to her, Miss Jenny alone continues the summary of Narcissa's conduct commenced in response to Elnora's

already discussed "She won't never be a Sartoris woman." She remembers Narcissa's early visits with her in the garden below, her unannounced engagement to Bayard, and the first appearance of the obscene letters. She recalls in detail (in the version slightly different from that given in *Sartoris* and already discussed above) her conversation with Narcissa when the younger woman brought a letter out—and the girl's refusal to show it to Old Bayard; she also recalls how Narcissa promised to burn it. Her recollections then move to the intervening years during which the two women have lived alone in the great house with the little boy and their servants, a time recently broken by Narcissa's inexcusable unannounced introduction to the Sartoris table of an outlander, the arrogant balding Eastern Jewish employee of the hated enemy (i.e., the impersonal, busybody spirit of modern government) and her subsequent two-day visit to Memphis. Miss Jenny is obviously beginning to answer some of her own questions when Bory comes in and announces, "We been in the creek . . . just sitting . . . all evening" (p. 727). The boy offers to remain with his great-great-great aunt but is sent out just as Narcissa enters and begins to speak. "It was those let—" she exclaims; but Miss Jenny, seemingly prepared (or preparing) for the worst, interrupts: "Wait. Before you begin. The jasmine. Do you smell it?" (p. 738) Narcissa tries again and Miss Jenny interrupts once more, insists on establishing this specific historical and ethical context for their forthcoming exchange: "Wait. Always about this time it begins. It has begun about this time of day in June for fifty-seven years this summer. I brought them from Carolina, in a basket. I remember how that first March I sat up all night, burning newspapers about the roots. Do you smell it?" Then, fortified by the familiar fragrance, she ventures to guess at what announcement Narcissa is about to make.[25] Though it would be for her—has been for her—an unavailable alternative to prolonged widowhood, she is still prepared for Narcissa to remarry, even a Yankee federal agent.[26] Her earlier encouragement of Narcissa in this course was halfhearted; but she has been ready to bear a remarriage because such is a thing of nature to which she has resigned herself. But Narcissa's reply is, ". . . it's not that bad." Miss Jenny can imagine no other explanation for the visit to Memphis after the appearance of the unwelcome guest with the Phi Beta Kappa key.

"You'll have to tell me then," she succumbs. With this Narcissa recommences:

> "It was those letters. Thirteen years ago. Don't you remember? Before Bayard came back from France. Before you even knew we were engaged. I showed you one of them and you wanted me to give it to Colonel Sartoris and let him find out who sent it and I wouldn't let you do it and you said no lady would permit herself to receive anonymous love letters no matter how badly she wanted to." (p. 739)

She continues, covering the whole sordid business—her promise to burn the letters, her concealment of them, their continued arrival, her marriage, and their theft, and finally, her subsequent agony at their circulation in the world before the eyes of strange men. However, she concludes, she had Bory. With his arrival and her husband's death, she ceased to think of the letters—until ". . . that man came out to see me, that Jew" (p. 740). Now the threads come together. The man was a Treasury agent, long on the case of the bank clerk-bank robber Byron Snopes (the author of the love letters and the person who had stolen them from her shortly after she was married). He (the Yankee) had come to see Narcissa to determine if she knew anything concerning the whereabouts of her would-be paramour, not to persecute her. The content of the letters was a matter of no importance to him; but he *was* going to "turn them in to the department." This information stirs in Narcissa all the old fears that had troubled her upon the original theft of her disgraceful treasures. She will be thought of, read about, by numberless anonymous men. The real, mutable, and turbulent world she has since Bayard's death shut out will once more impinge upon her carefully cultivated shelter, interrupt her self-regarding preoccupations. This idea is too much for her. And, with the same monstrous ease with which she betrayed her brother to Eustace Graham, she tempts the agent to violate his oath of office with the promise of the Memphis assignation. This bargain is consummated, the letters returned and burned, and the lips of the alien interloper concerning Narcissa's perfidy thereby sealed forever.

Narcissa's narration is calm, even languid; and the assurance with which she utters her usual contemptuous judgment of men as fools—that they are "all about the same, with their ideas of good and bad"—when taken with her statement that she "had to do it" is evidence that she feels no guilt, no compunction, about her whoredom. Indeed, she assures Miss Jenny, "I would have done more than that" (p. 741). And we believe her. Once finished, she yawns and stretches. She has, she imagines, proved her loyalty to Bory and the matriarch; and she takes satisfaction from the idea that all is settled

because she has arranged matters in such a way that no one can inform upon her. Moreover, she has made ritual expiation for her impurity by sitting with her son—an inadvertent irony, for he too and all his house are besmirched by that impurity (the real reason why Miss Jenny or any other lady of her class would be horrified by any such unchastity)—in what Miss Jenny describes knowingly as a "back-pasture Jordan" (p. 741). There is no contrition in the narrative, only boredom. She expects the chatelaine to accept its logic (and watery aftermath) as self-evident. This last gesture of expiation is Narcissa's sole concession to the reality of her misdeed; but her pleasure in it serves only to certify to the reader the depravity of her conception of respectability as sanctuary. It is a formal concession, part of the world of surfaces and appearances in which she dwells; and it removes her further from the spirit of "does, not is" than has her sin itself.

Well before Narcissa has finished her telling, however, Miss Jenny has heard all that she needs or wants to hear. With Narcissa's announcement that the agent *had had* the letters, the narrative of "There Was a Queen" turns. Miss Jenny repeats it aloud—twice and with emphasis—to insure that she has not mistaken her kinswoman by marriage. Apart from the assertion running throughout Faulkner's chronicle of the Sartoris family that no male of that family has ever been molded—reformed or corrupted—by a woman, and from the good impression that we have from the story itself of Bory's character, his Sartoris independence, hold on reality, and affection for Aunt Jenny which (together) should shield him from his mother's influence, we are at this point given to understand that Narcissa has won out.

Miss Jenny can no longer bear to live with her and has no reason to believe she can accomplish anything by doing so. Moreover, to continue would be (since she has survived so long only by determination to protect her "garden") to endorse tacitly Narcissa's variety of "respectability." Jasmine cannot easily overcome the new aroma which hangs over the house of Sartoris. But it can define the "intruder" for what it is: a bad smell. The old woman is too well-bred to berate her great-great nephew's widow; yet when Narcissa offers to help her after she has called out sharply for "Johnny," she refuses her emphatically: "No. Call Johnny. I want my hat." Their last tie is broken.

Miss Jenny Du Pre, a lady of quality, is going on a journey. And like any lady of her breeding—Miss Worsham/Habersham in her errands of mercy in *Go Down, Moses* and in *Intruder in the Dust*; Granny Millard in her call upon the commander of the Yankees to recover her Negroes, mules, and silver—Miss Jenny must go properly attired in

the armor of her station. But she will have the final courtesy from her kin, of whom Johnny is now the last that she will acknowledge. Narcissa has rid herself of one more Sartoris. By her own choice, Miss Jenny is left alone, erect in the wheelchair before her favorite window, with her hat on, looking out upon her special garden. Its durability consoles her as does the thought of Bory. They will now have to fend for themselves—and will do well enough. Her departure from life, like the rest of it, will be an act of will, an act well calculated to set a valedictory example.

The significance of Miss Jenny's call for her hat escapes Narcissa and her son. In Part IV (pp. 742–44) of "There Was a Queen," we see them at table, oblivious of what is transpiring down the hall. It has long been the custom of the old woman thus to require her hat when she wishes to compose herself. And besides, there is much which Narcissa wishes to say to Bory. With Miss Jenny not present, she moves him from the head of the table (the seat of *the* Sartoris, his seat since the death of his father and great-grandfather and [if he occupies it] the symbol of his assumption of the role to which he was born in the house of his fathers) to a chair beside her own, thus continuing in the character which she has more calamitously exhibited in the just-concluded and defended trip to Memphis. The rearrangement of the seats for dinner is still further evidence that Narcissa intends to unman her son, to make of him a substitute for his namesake uncle, what his father had declined to become, a co-inhabitant of the world behind the looking-glass. She is unquestionably a minion of this world and has no understanding of the proper role of her own sex or that of Bory as the Sartoris heir. But the boy, we are here as before given to understand (by his courtesy to Aunt Jenny and by his tolerant but disengaged puzzlement at his mother's afternoon amusements), is as immune to Narcissa's plea of "promise, promise" as was his father (p. 742). The garden will be in good hands, the order it epitomizes. All that will be necessary to its fruitful cultivation will be a woman for Bory, a woman like his Aunt Jenny.

The scene is depressing and yet reassuring. It clarifies the meaning of the library interview as do the earliest portions of the story. It completes a frame around that episode. Admittedly it says to us that Narcissa will do her worst to destroy Sartoris; but as Elnora and Miss Jenny have been delighted to tell each other earlier (pp. 730–31), and as we can now gather for ourselves, Bory is *really* a male Sartoris, who will "never miss nobody"—never be dependent upon anyone or anything for a crutch, or be swallowed up by the schemes of any mere woman.[27]

Maker and the Myth: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha (Jackson, 1978), ed. by Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie, attempt to put Faulkner's attitudes in the context of his time and culture and prevent their oversimplification. Finally Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie gather an exceptional variety of viewpoints on the subject in *Faulkner and Women* (Jackson, 1985). Generally, however, feminist commentary on Faulkner is almost comically wrong-headed.

2. From Jean Stein's interview with Faulkner in Malcolm Cowley's edition of *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* (New York, 1959), p. 140.

3. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven, 1963), p. 381; and again in *The Hidden God* (New Haven, 1963), p. 27. In the latter, Brooks goes so far as to describe Faulkner's notions on this subject as "medieval."

Anticipating Brooks (and, with him, the best of guides to Faulkner's understanding of the place of women) is Andrew Lytle in his three review essays on his Southern contemporary, first issued in *The Sewanee Review* (vols. LVIII, LXIII, and LXV) and now most conveniently gathered in *The Hero With the Private Parts* (Baton Rouge, 1966 ["Regeneration for the Man," from 1949, on pp. 129–36; "The Son of Man: He Will Prevail," from 1955, on pp. 103–28; "*The Town*: Helen's Last Stand," from 1957, on pp. 137–47]). Lytle discovers in Faulkner's fiction an overview of society very close to that which he embodies in his own. In a foreword to his *A Novel, A Novella, and Four Stories* (New York, 1958) he writes, "Man's attitude to woman is the foundation of society under God. In the South, because of the prevailing sense of family, the matriarch becomes the prevailing image" (pp. xxvii–xxviii). Women are the most important feature of "the body of the world," held (imperfectly even if worthily) by men in "fee simple" (*The Hero With the Private Parts*, p. 118). Such theory could as easily be proved out of *At the Moon's Inn* (Indianapolis, 1941), *A Name for Evil* (Indianapolis, 1947), and *The Velvet Horn* (New York, 1957) as from Faulkner's "The Bear," *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, *The Mansion*, *Intruder in the Dust*, *The Unvanquished*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* Concerning the more passive "conserving" to be done by ladies and the importance of their conscious participation in the system, Lytle is equally instructive. As with Judith Mebane ("Old Scratch in the Valley," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XIII [1932], 237–46) and Kate McCowan (in "Jericho, Jericho, Jericho" [*A Novel, A Novella, and Four Stories*, pp. 3–18]), their business is to restrain, confine, and make fruitful masculine energy. Usurpation—performed in the name of cowardice, presumption, or necessity (the latter, according to Mr. Lytle, the error of Rosa Millard in *The Unvanquished*)—removes the cornerstone of civil order, "the Godsweal," as readily as masculine sins against the norms of husbandry.

To the same effect as Mr. Lytle's Faulkner essays and related fiction (though not specifically about either) are his *A Wake for the Living* (New York, 1975) and an earlier paper, "Cockcrow," by his good friend Caroline Gordon, *Southern Review*, I, N.S. (1965), 554–69. Other reinforcement appears in Warren Beck's *Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy* (Madison, 1961), pp. 98–137, and in Karl Zink's "Faulkner's Garden: Women and the Immemorial Earth," *Modern Fiction Studies*, II (1956), 139–49.

4. John Faulkner, *My Brother Bill* (New York, 1963), p. 70. Mrs. Rogers (p. 236) blames Sigmund Freud for the anti-feminism in the work of Faulkner (and in that of many of his contemporaries).

5. These white matriarchs have, of course, obvious Negro counterparts—counterparts who often play, at one time, similar roles in two worlds: Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* and "That Evening Sun"; Clytie in *Absalom, Absalom!*; Molly Beauchamp and Rider's aunt in *Go Down, Moses*; Aunt Callie in *The Reivers*; Louvinia in *The Unvanquished* and *Soldiers' Pay*; and, certainly, Elnora in *Sartoris* and "There Was a Queen."

Two other genuine matriarchs (white) who appear in Faulkner's fiction but stand outside the Yoknapatawpha cycle proper are Grandmother Ewing ("Golden Land") and Marthe Demont (*A Fable*). Melisandre Backus Harriss, who becomes Gavin Stevens's wife in *Knight's Gambit* and reappears in *The Mansion*, is candidate for membership in the company, but is probably *too* passive (or too dull) to be numbered with it.

6. Brooks, *William Faulkner*, pp. 69–71; 88–93; and 288–92.

7. In most detail in "Brotherhood in 'The Bear,' " *Modern Age*, X (1966), 278–81; "Faulkner, James Baldwin, and the South," *Georgia Review*, XX (1966), 431–43: "The Winding Horn: Hunting and the Making of Men in Faulkner's 'Race at Morning'," *Papers on English Language and Literature*, I (1965), 272–78; "The Gum Tree Scene: Observations on the Structure of 'The Bear,' " *Southern Humanities Review*, I (1967), 141–50; and "All the Daughters of Eve: 'Was' and the Unity of *Go Down, Moses*," *Arlington Quarterly* I (1967): 28–37.

8. James Branch Cabell, *As I Remember It* (New York: 1955), pp. 112–20, seems to have had an appreciation and understanding of Southern women not at all unlike that of William Faulkner. He observes (p. 112) that no wife worth submitting to seems to believe that the man who married her could have been born with "quite good sense" and he adds (p. 119) that women he has known have a "rational . . . commonsensibleness" about their sub-lunary affairs "not ever granted to mere males." They are, he concludes, never "disgusted by any just plain ordinary physical side of life" because they "learn about [it] in childhood as a matter of course" (p. 120).

9. Robert A. Jelliffe, ed., *Faulkner at Nagano* (Tokyo, 1956), p. 70.

10. *Collected Stories* (New York, 1950), pp. 727–44. All citations from Faulkner's works above or following are from the Random House hard-cover editions. References to short fiction are to *Collected Stories*.

In her exasperating discussion of this story (a part of her even more unconvincing reply to the misogyny charge), "William Faulkner and the Southern Concept of Woman," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XV (1961–1962), 1–16, Elizabeth M. Kerr contends (p. 7) that it is nothing more or less than a negative judgment of the traditional Southern view of women. Her theory is that the conduct and fortune of the antagonist (Narcissa) in "There Was a Queen" is evidence of Faulkner's disenchantment with restrictive conventions concerning the place of women, conventions inherited by most Southerners of his generation. Miss Kerr, in denominating Narcissa as "the most complete example of the pure Southern woman," convinces the careful student of Faulkner of little more than her own willful stupidity—a stupidity perversely replicated by Edmond L. Volpe, in *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (New York, 1964), pp. 82–83, and Donald Mordecai Kartiganer, in "The Individual and the Community: Values in the Novels of William Faulkner" (Brown University, unpubl. diss., 1964), *passim*: the former, on "There Was a Queen," in particular (though he is bad on everything else that objectifies Faulkner's piety); the latter, on Faulkner's social views in general. Howe (p. 263) is, reluctantly, more sensible; grudgingly he admits his own prejudice, writing (of "There Was a Queen") that "it helps one to understand Faulkner in his aspect of traditional Southerner: it is a good corrective for those critics, like the author of this book, who tend to impatience with that side of Faulkner." Olga W. Vickery is, as usual, helpful *and* misleading: appreciative of Miss Jenny and aware of Faulkner's admiration for her but wide of the mark in employing the plain-spoken old woman as a stick for beating her male kinsmen and, through them, the South at large (*The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Introduction* [Baton Rouge, 1964], pp. 24–25). Brooks touches briefly but masterfully on the story, in *William Faulkner*, p. 109; his correction of

Vickery, Kerr, Volpe, and Kartiganer may, however, be of even greater value (pp. 8, 33, and 90). Finally, in James B. Meriwether's indispensable dissertation, "The Place of *The Unvanquished* in William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Series" (Princeton, 1958), there are five pages (937–41) of the most perceptive commentary on "There Was a Queen" yet written. Meriwether does not undervalue the story as fiction, misconceive of its structure, or minimize its right to our attention as his subject's "darkest picture of the end of the Sartoris legend."

More recent commentary on "There Was a Queen" appears in Philip Castille's " 'There Was a Queen' and Narcissa Sartoris," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 28 (1975): 307–15; in Sherrill Harbison, "Two Sartoris Women: Faulkner, Femininity and Changing Times," pp. 289–303 of *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Sartoris Family*, (Boston, 1985), ed. Arthur F. Kinney; in Max Putzel, "Faulkner's Memphis Stories," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 59 (1983): 264–68; and in Hans H. Skei, *William Faulkner: The Novelist as Short Story Writer* (Oslo, 1986), pp. 169–72. Castille and Skei reply directly to an earlier version of this essay.

11. Despite her constant shafts at her kinsman's expense, when she tells the story of her brother's death in the quixotic gesture she salutes his spirit. Her reiterated scorn, for Sartoris males especially and all men in general, is a measure of self-defense. With it she steels herself against the losses which their foolhardiness and the pressure of barbarous times upon their sense of duty occasion.

12. *Poems* (Denver, 1961), pp. 115–16.

13. *Sartoris*, pp. 259–60, 289, 356–58. Narcissa's tastes in reading about "antic worlds" and "antic people" who are outside the pale of mutability and exist where "things happen as they should" and her retreat behind "forewarned bastions" before the tales of male Sartorises with which Miss Jenny regales her after Bayard's final departure give further evidence of her escapist inclinations.

14. Perhaps only a little worse. Her perfidy in "There Was a Queen" *is* an extension of her earlier behavior. She appears in a relatively good light in *Sartoris*—while she is in love with Bayard III—and is particularly humanized by the experience. But she reverts; and what she suffers for love (not sex—she learns with Bayard that that alone can't touch her selfhood, learns with what consequences we soon discover) makes her an even more virulent feminine narcissist than she had been before she allowed herself to be drawn into it. Professor Brooks, in response to the darkness of her character in the story here under discussion, suggests that Narcissa may have been fundamentally changed for use in it (*William Faulkner*, p. 109). I think not. It might be more precise to say that Faulkner "completed" his portrait of her in allowing her name to fulfill its promise. Bribery by fornication seems small after the murder of Lee Goodwin (cf. *Sanctuary*, 253–89). But in a Sartoris woman it is, nonetheless, more surprising. An aristocracy survives a little killing with ease, but not this sort of corruption in its womenfolk.

15. Narcissa, in her covert enjoyment of Byron Snopes's awkward declaration of passion, is in behavior and psychology similar to Temple Drake as she appears in those portions of *Sanctuary* (pp. 56–61) which depict her adventure at the bootleggers' hideout up to the time of her unnatural rape. Temple, like Narcissa, "plays" with a role she is more than half afraid of.

16. Vickery, p. 24.

17. Ibid. Mrs. Vickery says of Narcissa that in her character "an excessive concern with appearances takes the place of any genuine sense of ethics." In keeping with this concern is her persistence, long after it is decorous for her to do so, in wearing white: a persistence which betokens her confirmation in narcissism.

18. *Sartoris*, p. 201. Miss Jenny's reply to Narcissa's prissy description of Belle Mitchell as a sexual creature is simply, "all women are."

19. Narcissa's horror at the killing of the first possum caught on that hunt goes along with her general cowardly and artificial fastidiousness about elemental matters. She is the human double of the young dog that abandons the hunt out of fear of the nameless dark "something out dar" (as Caspey, Bayard's hunting companion, describes it [*Sartoris*, p. 287]). The darkness and the hunt's bloody climax are tropes for a reality she must recognize, belong to, and contend with if she is to hold Bayard; instead she runs to the house.

For another analogue see Allen Tate's George Posey, *The Fathers* (Denver, 1950), pp. 44–45, who is embarrassed by the plantation bull about its appropriate business. Like Narcissa, he enjoys "playing" along the brink of the "abyss" (Tate's equivalent of Faulkner's "darkness") while pretending it isn't there (pp. 44, 185) and is "more refined" than his traditionalist antagonists (the Buchans) "but less civilized" (p. 179). However, like the later married and widowed Narcissa, his alienation from Nature finally takes the form of violence, not retreat.

20. Concerning Elnora's merits, see Meriwether, p. 40. He contends that the alteration of her genealogy in "There Was a Queen" (to include a Sartoris) gives purchase and extra significance to her remarks and serves as an explanation of her peculiarly multidimensional perspective. She is twice an insider, both as a kinswoman and as a faithful retainer. Faulkner frequently makes special use of mulattoes as a "halfway house" between white and Negro worlds and seems to attribute to them (despite disclaimers to the contrary) a special insight.

21. As was suggested earlier in this essay, Faulkner's young or modern ("new") Negroes appear, for the most part, in no better light than their white counterparts. However, it should be added that his Negro women, even if contemporary, are "freer" of newfangled delusions and notions about the role of the sex than are their white sisters.

22. For a perfect parallel to Elnora's address see the dialogue on "quality" between Aunt Munsie and her daughter in Peter Taylor's "What You Hear From Em?" in *The Widows of Thornton* (New York, 1964), pp. 24–28. This black Tennessee matriarch rejects not only money and appearances as marks of status, but also good name—if not lived up to. For her there is no gentility or active virtue that is not associated with a definite place in a definite social order (p. 38). And the big city, she realizes, makes both unlikely.

23. It is yet the custom in the South among women of good family for a daughter, upon marriage, to take a sprig of jasmine from her mother's garden to plant at her new home. I am indebted to the late W. A. Tornwall, a native Mississippian, for an enlightening explanation of the meaning of flowers and shrubs to the ladies of his state. According to Dr. Tornwall, the cape jasmine is, of all plants, the one we should expect to find on the grounds of a plantation or town house presided over by a lady of Miss Jenny's upbringing.

24. H. L. Weatherby, in an essay printed after the preparation of this study, anticipated my attribution of iconographic significance to Faulkner's gardens—though without reference to "There Was a Queen"—in "Sutpen's Garden," *Georgia Review*, XXI (1967), 354–69. In Weatherby's view, the parodic garden at Sutpen's Hundred (in *Absalom, Absalom!*)—especially Faulkner's failure to make full use of its symbolic potential—is proof of the Mississippian's ignorance of traditional tropology: proof, in fact, of his ignorance of "Christian doctrine and theology." As this writer perceives it, "There Was a Queen" indicates, to the contrary, that Faulkner *does* know his images and how to deploy them. Sutpen's garden differs from Miss Jenny's as does his purpose in life from hers; as does sterility so absolute that it is unaware of the existence of grace from the plenitude that benison once guaranteed. It is consistent for Faulkner to mute in the one fiction what he asserts in the other (i.e., Eden restored). To do otherwise would be to destroy the coherence of both.

25. For confirmation of my insistence on the significance of her flowers in Miss Jenny's life, see the final pages of *Sartoris* (379–80) where she revives, in the presence of a strong aroma of jasmine, from her despair at the death of Bayard III—revives to plan again for the future of her people.

26. Doc Loosh Peabody gave her a chance (*Sartoris*, p. 295); she refused, but appreciated the offer. Perhaps Miss Jenny's reluctance to remarry was a case of romantic loyalty; or then again, perhaps she was too much like James Branch Cabell's Grandmother Branch, who, at such a prospect, declared that she could not remarry because anyone who was so little a gentleman as "to take another man's leavings" was beneath her (*As I Remember It*, p. 144).

Evidence that Narcissa may have considered remarriage appears in *Sanctuary* (pp. 23–27), where she entertains the attentions of various young men—Gowan Stevens for one. A "tame" mate could serve her purposes very well, if she weren't the Widow Sartoris. For sex alone, as was argued earlier, is no danger to her "cocoon." A half-man, one who "could be mistaken for a Mississippian on a dancefloor" (and nowhere else), could be an adjunct to her inviolable selfhood—*absorbed*, as was her brother, and as her husband and her son might have been had they not been Sartorises. But Gowan is too little man even for these purposes; and besides, she doesn't need him or his predecessors except as decorations. Moreover, she has been "burned" by marriage already. It is unpredictable. For her it will be a last resort.

27. It may seem curious to some modern readers that Elnora and Miss Jenny are delighted by what others might take to be the coldness and indifference of male Sartorises to female "hovering." Such imperceptions can easily be explained away, however, with a simple formula to which Faulkner seems to give assent: the man who "needs" a woman too much is probably unworthy of her. Meriwether (p. 40) seems to miss the mark in commenting on Bory. He imagines that in the structure of "There Was a Queen" there appear indications of his future bad character. They are there; but they refer not to Bory specifically, but rather to the world in which he will grow up. That Bory comes to his full manhood (as a daring soldier and a mighty hunter) we learn in *The Town* (p. 244), *The Mansion* (p. 206), and *Knight's Gambit* (pp. 239–40). And we are told nothing to indicate that Narcissa affected him as she had intended. That Faulkner never expected for us to imagine that she could is indicated by revisions which he made in the final draft of *Sanctuary* (Meriwether, pp. 30–31).

III.

POLITICS *PER SE*

Rhetoric and Respectability: Conservatives and the Problem of Language

Since November of 1980 conservatives have been struggling with the problem of adjusting their public posture so as to reflect changes in their situation. Following electoral triumph and the dramatic shift in the temper of their countrymen which produced so many encouraging results at the polls, they have been obliged to represent themselves, through the spoken or the written word, in a very new light, as figures operating inside the current of history, not against it. I make here, of course, a distinction in rhetoric. In particular, conservatives have had difficulty in moving from the forensic into the deliberative mode—from the speech proper to critique, of the accuser who defends his right to exist with a censure of those in authority, into the language of those who are themselves (if only, in most cases, through surrogates) in power. Our custom as conservatives—indeed, our occupation—has been to inhabit the wilderness, there crying out against interlopers who occupy the citadel and dispossess the rightful heirs. That role we understand perfectly, and the sound which it makes: a prophetic song of wrath to come. Moreover, we have learned how to suggest in general terms a view of the political things very different from that of our adversaries—an idiom for political campaigning, if not for policy. But what we should say about, or to (or in support of) a government which we helped to create—and which is at least *officially* appreciative of our labors in its behalf—is a mystery beyond our ken. And most especially since it is a government which has been forced to do its work while hamstrung by the standing edifice of an omnicompetent state—a hostile filter through which it must translate its will into action, or else surrender to the inertia embodied in that mighty Leviathan.

Without being understood on our own terms, according to any discourse we could recognize as appropriate for the exposition of our cause, conservatives have, in these last few years, experienced political success, popular approval, and a limited but exciting influence over the operations of government—inside and outside the executive, judicial and legislative branches. Moreover, in playing at least a symbolic role in the conversations surrounding many issues of national importance, they have also achieved an unprecedented visibility. But a new language answering to their new circumstances they have not yet discovered. Instead of discussing in their own way the merits of particular measures, decisions or approaches to the public business, too many conservatives accept by default, for lack of the necessary alternative, a rhetoric and a language which attach naturally to the politics of their enemies—the source from which they are derived. This is a rhetoric and language for administration which has long been a given feature of the Washington scene, organized not only by a texture, a set of images, a series of modifiers which color it in a certain unmistakable way but also (and more importantly), by submission to a network of ultimate terms—what Richard Weaver called "god terms." Inside of this verbal mesh there is no place for consideration of the common good, or a prior loyalty to the Constitution of the United States—the loyalty which all of our public servants proclaim as a condition of the office or assignment which they are expected to perform. Nor is there in such a closed system or overlay any room for prudential restrictions of the kind which mitigate against the absolute claims of ideological shibboleths. Or for a law that limits law—its scope and agency, what may, for "good causes," be attempted in its name.

It is a convention of the theory of language that our apprehension of reality and our ability to express it are conditioned—directed, restrained and enriched—by the idiom into which we translate such perceptions. Each language as a system has an intrinsic capacity to sharpen our awareness of certain realities (in society, in the natural world, in the soul) and to render the particular angle of vision implicit in its prescriptive structure. To put the matter in simple terms, it is easier to think or say some things in French, others in German, etc. Formally speaking, there is a consanguinity between what is said and how we say it. Literary critics narrow this generalization down into an observation about the language of a period or particular writer. It also applies to verbal constructs which belong to a particular region, social

station, occupation or school of thought. The latter are more specialized configurations, ordered specifically by a sharing of values and objectives. I prefer to describe each of them as a universe of discourse, meaning by that no more than the familiar proposition in epistemology that what we are shapes what we see. Writes Weaver in his essay "Language Is Sermonic," "We are all of us preachers in private or public capacities. We have no sooner uttered words than we have given impulse to other people to look at the world, or some part of it, in our way."

The dilemma of conservatives speaking for *their government*, about what that government might or should do, is that they lack the requisite technique for deflecting out of its tyrannical, demanding mode the rhetoric of ultimate terms and have forgotten the alternative political principles which would lead to the recovery of that technique, to a recollection of the method which follows from the vision of right order they supposedly affirm. This now familiar rhetoric is what Michael Oakeshott calls teleocratic—defined by a commitment to purposes as opposed to procedures or ways of doing business—indifferent to the harm which might be done to our political and social structure by insisting on the absolute priority of realizing certain ideological goals, regardless of impediments to such a realization built into the American regime. The best response to this pleading is the argument that society must be preserved and protected if it is expected to facilitate the application of sound principles to the public sphere—that such a labor of preservation comes first, and sometimes requires a balance in the competing claims of various absolute terms which have a standing among us. It is an argument which fulfills itself in bringing cries of outrage from the devotees of these familiar abstractions. And a response which is legitimately rhetorical, assuming that certain questions are not open to inquiry: a response invoked therefore to confound a dialectic only disguised as rhetoric—what the Left has established as the primary language of American politics.

The conservative alternative to this discourse *qua* effrontery is what I have called here the rhetoric of the common good. It has a theoretical ground in what the Church once spoke of as the doctrine of cupidity: a doctrine concerning the sin of giving preference to a lesser as opposed to a greater good or obligation. With reference to three of the most potent of these ultimate terms—peace, charity, and tolerance in the sense of a special concern for various groups ostensibly disad-

vantaged by our economic, social, and political system—I will illustrate what I mean by the foregoing distinction between kinds of language. I will suggest how a proper rhetoric should operate in restoring to the political conversation of our time the character it should exhibit in balancing the always conflicting priorities of statecraft. And explain why though peace, generosity, and brotherhood are, by definition, preferable to carnage, selfishness, and bigotry, we are always obliged to ask of measures designed to further these ends, "At what cost?" and "At whose expense?" in weighing their advisability.

It is an unavoidable truth of the present political scene that, when ultimate terms such as the three here in question (or their synonyms) are invoked in debate over a specific issue, conservatives who worry about the craft of governing are often paralyzed with the fear of being disreputable. Forgetting their obligations to defend the inherited way of our culture, to oppose what threatens our security against an invader, our social peace, or economic stability, they are reluctant to forfeit the legitimacy of policies for the present—policies to which their reputation will attach—which they have in mind by offending against what they concede to be sacrosanct boundaries. Their primary nightmare is that of being accused of bigotry, war-mongering, insensitivity, and indifference to suffering, of being identified as persons without ordinary human fellow-feeling. And thus they are diverted from their first order of business—to preserve, protect, and defend—by being put on the defensive, able to make only arguments which object to the labels, not analyses which discredit their opponents. In the process all interest in what is the characteristic virtue of their situation in life is lost.

There is no more potent example of the usefulness of the rhetoric of the common good than what occurs in the context of a conversation concerning war and peace. It is an axiom of American politics in our time that any political leader who wishes to see this country use military force to achieve its purposes can expect to be put completely on the defensive. There is a large component of our population which will not go even so far as to agree that nations have a right to protect themselves, to survive. As never before, it is now possible for American politicians to inhibit or frustrate the military policy of any administration in power with the spectre of body bags, the prospect of escalating terrorism, the possibility of long campaigns, or the ominous shadow of mutually-assured destruction. In Washington there is a large disarmament lobby supported by choice spirits who either doubt

that any cause is worth the risk of their lives or who, in their refinement, believe that a foreign policy can be built on nothing more than our unwillingness to kill. Many of our countrymen are so impressed by their own horror of violence that they will barely agree to let the rest of us oppose the violation of our borders by an armed enemy. As to our role in preserving the ability of other men to make such detached choices by supporting among them a liberty on which our liberty depends, the *recherché* moralists of peace make no concession whatsoever. That they might hate war so much as to bring it down on the lives of other men does not occur as a possibility in their elevated calculus. Nor that they might be surrendering the life and liberty of others by insisting that the government of their country submit to the test of their personal moral judgment. By maintaining that it is possible to love peace, privately, so much that you get war which others must fight—and by reminding all that we cannot improve our country by arranging for its destruction—we invoke the rhetoric of the common good. And reduce to a matter of almost no importance, to a tautology, the self-evident truth that peace is to be preferred to war.

It is to be hoped that the events of the last few years have brought us further out from underneath the shadow of Vietnam. But the collective pacifism brought on by the form of that Asian defeat is not fully behind us. The simple truth (and the oldest locus of distinctions concerning the common good, except for those having to do with crime) that a condition of membership in a society is a willingness to fight against its enemies runs directly against insistence on a right of conscience to pick according to our scruples which of the nation's wars will also be our wars. We may of course grant our countrymen an exemption from military obligation, as we grant some rights to residents of the United States who are not citizens. But it is a given with organized societies that personal preference for peace has never left the citizen of a nation engaged in conflict *at peace*. Even if he insists that he gives his allegiance only to what his country *might become*, its dream of itself inside the millennium. Such is Dante's point in Canto VII of his *Purgatory*. There Henry III of England is condemned for much praying and piety when it was his office to order the kingdom and defend its frontiers. There is another similar story from early European history in which a prince neglects to raise his standard when Vikings come a plundering and instead goes often to hear the Mass. For the good of the realm his barons hack him down in the midst of his devotions; the clergy avert their eyes from this sight and complain not at all. Then is a new king crowned, his standard raised

and the invader repelled wherever he touches the land. In his cupidity the dead prince enjoyed such a lofty spirit that he lacked the virtue necessary to fulfill the obligations of his office. He was an embodiment of peace and love—to the hurt and injury of other honest men, in whose name he had no right to turn his cheek. In such instances the rhetoric of the common good allows for dynastic change and restorative revolution. Even though *raison d'état* is often the pleading of despots and must be invoked with caution, supported always by a clear argument, from consequences.

The same line of reasoning bears down upon ill-advised and disproportionate insistence on measureless charity and the organized forms of public and private largesse that applies to uncivil, solipsistic opposition to war. That our economic system must be protected from the inappropriate and unreasonable strains which might be put upon it by too many demands for distribution of the world's goods is quite clear to those who realize that the development of the third-world countries and the continuation of their independence is not possible without the dynamic engine of the American market economy. There could be no clearer instance of cupidity than for us to so overdo our generosity that we mortally injure that mighty machine and thus lose the ability to defend ourselves or assist our neighbors. If charity is good it does not follow (even if needed) that more charity is better. The notion that need creates a right to whatever might answer to such demands holds up only under very special circumstances—if we recognize how much the future in freedom of the rest of the world hinges upon the presence and persistence of the United States as a nation both rich and powerful. In this sense only need (for hope and freedom) creates or fosters right (the power and prosperity of this country). No more obvious instance of a connection between the doctrine of cupidity and the rhetoric of the common good could be found. Moreover, it is through such pulling away from the particular, emotionally compelling instance (as in the picture of a child in poverty) that the rhetoric of ultimate terms is most easily exposed as the mischievous simplification which it is.

A wide variety of absolute terms which assert their authority inside the conversation that is today's American politics could be introduced at this point. I might complete my illustration of conflicting varieties of rhetorical strategy more or less suited to the discourse of conservatism by speaking of science or progress or even reason—to mention only a portion of the list. But none of these powerful abstractions could function so well or with such force in summary and

peroration as the one which I now invoke. Tolerance with respect to the status of minorities or freedom from prejudice has become *the* sacrosanct value in the moral lexicon of contemporary America. And is thus also the cause of our most exceptional violations of the rhetoric of the common good. Opposition to any measure which claims to serve that lofty purpose is treated, as Senator John East once remarked, as if it were an offense against religion and revealed truth —as such offenses were understood in earlier times, when they were likely to be punished with fire. Of those who would insist on preferring a greater to a lesser good—the protection of the Constitution (and thus of all our liberties) to relief for the distress of a minority—great courage is required. For as Bill Buckley has reminded us in writing of the career of his friend Senator Barry Goldwater (column of September 16, 1985), opposition to measures proposed to aid the blacks (or Native Americans, or Mexican Americans, or as the case may be) will be, after-the-fact, invariably interpreted as racism, regardless of the "dubious constitutionality" of these laws or court decisions. Which is precisely why the Left has attached so much of its contemporary agenda to an argument against prejudice—even when racial considerations are not involved.

To apply the rhetoric of the common good to the last thirty years of civil rights revolution is to ask whether the changes produced by Court and Congress in the official situation of the American Negro have been worth the danger to us all which went with these transformations of the United States Constitution: the risk of converting a nomocratic, customary, procedural government into a power able to attempt whatever it thinks fit; into a teleocratic instrument, ready and able to do whatever it defines as good. It is to ask whether the tradition of restricted Federal authority produced and nurtured by two hundred years of American history must give way because the grievances or misfortunes of one segment of our population are more important than limitations on the scope and outreach of the law which honor the liberty of all free men—or at least attempted to do so before the fundamental law was reconstructed by judicial ingenuity into something new and strange. And to question further what unexpected things hurried through the door shielded by proximate talk of civil rights after legislation and the rulings of various courts broke it down and allowed mere politicians (administrative and judicial, as well as legislative) to think of the Constitution as law always unfinished—like a big turnip, but with no end to its growth. The proper response to such confusion in constitutional morality lies not in praise for civil

disobedience and pictures of Dr. King to decorate our walls but in what Judge Brevard Hand of the Mobile District has written of Mr. Justice Stevens's timeserving concurrence in the case of *Runyan vs McCrary* (1976): that a true court of American law "feels a stronger tug from the Constitution, which it has sworn to support and defend." So may men reason in applying the rhetoric of the common good.

There are of course prudent arguments which work in an opposite direction on all three of these questions, arguments which amount to more than a noisy litany concerning natural rights. The doctrine of cupidity may be answered without recourse to ultimate terms. And the nature of any conversation concerning policy alternatives brought back within legitimate boundaries, where the norms important to conservatives will also get a hearing. In such exchanges conservatives will be on their own ground: ready with a way of dealing with conflicting principles, with (for an instance) the balance between the legitimate rights of persons disadvantaged by reason of color alone and the essentially conservative desire of a mother to keep her children away from schools where nothing is to be learned but vulgarity, violence, desperation, and the logic of racial hatred. On these grounds we may concede a little generosity in the name of that larger community to which all of us belong—and in which we must all be allowed a share and place. On these grounds, but not any others.

Concerning these three issues, war, charity, and tolerance, I have not changed my mind since I was a graduate student at Vanderbilt some thirty years ago. Not my mind, or my method for arriving at such conclusions, the way in which I reason with regard to political abstractions. My eccentricity is thus in not having participated in the mysterious metamorphosis or fusion with the enemy which separates my politics from those of so many younger conservatives, men and women who have invested in government as it is, and who have forgotten what the word means. Or else never knew.

Therefore it should not be at all surprising that like Joe Sobran in the thirtieth anniversary issue of *National Review*, I have for today acknowledged "the necessity for a dose of radicalism," seen advantage in attempting to shock some of you back into focus and away from identification with the pale parody of conservatism so popular in Washington City. With Paul Gottfried in a recent *Intercollegiate Review*, I insist that we should defend our version of conservatism with language and arguments suited to that purpose: language and arguments which derive naturally from that which we would conserve. And that we attack at every opportunity definitions of political

respectability which have their ultimate origins in the Father of all Lies, whose other name is confusion, and who offered our Lord a power to do good in this world if He would honor the evil from which that power came.

On Being Conservative in a Post-Liberal Era

We may rightfully assume that no politics, no model of government, teleological paradigm or philosophy of culture can escape from being judged by the practical consequences which follow from its establishment as part of the rhetoric or self-description, the apologetics, of a government in power. It is useless to plead an anterior purity of motives or to mutter of dilution that comes of leaving a rich inheritance in the hands of unworthy successors. Of politics it may well be written, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). On such grounds the heathen have often complained of what happens to Christianity when it becomes the Church. Through God's special consideration, the truth of the Faith may survive contamination by those who profess it; but no political party can expect to deserve so much in the way of irresistible grace—nor any political teaching native to our place and condition. Nineteen eighty-six is therefore a good time for American conservatives to ask of one another what our situation will soon be if it continues to develop in the direction of attenuation and apostasy—the direction it now follows. And what we should do to forestall such declension.

I give assent to the suggestion that, as conservatives, as a company of generally like-minded individuals who have worked together to preserve a certain known felicity, we have come to a time for careful self-examination. As I see the matter, we are in the process of forfeiting a well-developed corporate character through identification with the prudential decisions of the Reagan Administration. Stated briefly, we have been politically absorbed—weighed in the balance and found wanting by our readiness to disappear into the routine operations of a government we did much to create. Our vision of the good society and of the American political tradition at its best has been pre-empted by considerations of policy or the ephemera of

"management style." In this calculus the conservative cause becomes synonymous with tepid compromises rationalized in public by servants of the President who have no history or personal principle in common with the tradition we once defended. This observation is not, in the context of the argument I am making here, a criticism of particular positions taken by a White House limited in what it can attempt by the continuing influence of the Left in Court and Congress, the resistance of the Federal bureaucracy and the unrelenting power of a hostile Eastern press and media. But we must not allow the necessary and understandable maneuverings of a friendly government beset by enemies *who are both our adversaries and theirs* to change the consensus among our component parts on what it means to be conservative—to change it away from definitions once agreed upon by most of us: accepted as legitimate after a long labor of memory and a little painful dialectic.

There are, to be sure, certain groups who have recently attached the conservative label to themselves who enjoy the confusion which I have just described because it allows them to so redefine our position that we can no longer hold it for our own—allows them to steal our identity and put it to uses at variance with its origins: to invert it into something foreign to itself, leaving those who are still conservatives in the familiar sense of the term with no ground on which to stand. These interlopers want to get their agenda defined as axiomatic by leaving no useful space to their right; and they want all the persuasive advantages that come, in a post-liberal era, of calling their view conservative regardless of its essentially statist, pacifist and coercively egalitarian implications. Part of this artful attenuation comes of selling a definition of respectability in politics that wins the day for them without arguing their case for (to mention only a portion of their position) the welfare state, arms control negotiations, support for international banks, acceptance of Communist tyranny in captive nations, civil-rights laws covering private business, housing, and employment, civil disobedience, and a policy of exporting democracy to places where it cannot be planted in the foreseeable future. Before we attempt any other resolution of our present difficulty we must determine never again to allow political propriety to be defined for us by the Left. Or by opportunists who have no principle apart from a preference for being in power, even if it costs them the trouble of learning a new political language to disguise their "merely practical" objectives.

Of course, some of those who employ the perverse sort of argument from definition which I have just summarized are not disguised liberals or pragmatists but ex-liberals: men and women belonging to the political Center who are friends of the Administration, even though they continue to affirm that the leftward drift of 1932–1968 was essentially a wholesome development and that the mistake came later, from radicals who wished to go too far—beyond ordinary "progress" toward "unreality." This view of modern American history was summarized for us recently by a number of choice spirits who contributed to the November, 1985, issue of *Commentary*—and earlier by Norman Podhoretz's interesting memoir *cum* apologia, *Breaking Ranks*. The rhetorical problem of the neoconservatives in employing as predicate a leftist past packaged up in meliorist assumptions is obvious to the most inexperienced logician. Concerning the assumed necessity for a government that is instrumental in its impact on the lives of ordinary Americans they continue to speak from the Left. They embrace most of the New Deal, Fair Deal, and Great Society as productive of social peace and react to any threat to the "achievements" of that era as if they were anchored there even now. Their difficulty as opponents of the agenda of the contemporary Left is that they imagine that the best strategy for conservatives is to give up two-thirds of their historic position in order to preserve the rest—thus ignoring the advantage given to liberals by reducing the territory which they must contest, leaving them free to concentrate all their force against an enemy already two-thirds beaten: to focus thus with the inertia of the struggle, the political momentum, clearly moving in their direction. Those determined to win such a struggle will not wait so long to give battle or surrender to the ancient enemy so much of an advantage.

There are of course natural and lasting arguments among conservatives *per se*. These should continue. Yeats says that poetry is made out of a quarrel with ourselves. The same is true of serious political thought. As a group conservatives are divided by great and legitimate differences on the authority of natural rights theory over a distinctively American politics, about the primacy of economic considerations over other features of a sound polity, and concerning the conflicting claims of order and liberty. On all of these we are not of one mind. But we do take these questions seriously—and agree that politics amounts to more than the victory of the moment: conservatism to more than opportunism, pop sociology and a series of position papers. Furthermore we come together in our hatred of tyranny, our preference for a rule of law, our opposition to schemes of levelling and our

disposition to measure all systems by the kind of men and women nurtured by them. Thus we keep alive the old teaching that merely to be in power, to govern, is not enough: that the great problems are not those of administrative technique, crisis management or budgetary restraint but rather those of social thought which will in the end decide whether there is anything to manage, any money to spend, any property to tax, or borders to defend. Under the Reagan regime this task is ours because no one else is able (or willing) to perform it.

It is in the context of the prescription out of which we live, of our sense of a connection between past and present, that we as conservatives may ask the question of how we should support the President—how much and how little. *And especially of how much we should support those among his servants who in word or action interpret him into being the opposite of what we had expected*: so behaved without authority in the text of his campaign or the idiom of his platform. Both our doctrine and our hope are rooted in a particular history as inherited through the process by which they were formed and by means of which they are regularly refined. It is a process which has also taught us not to be ingrates. For among us loyalty has always been more important than conceptual rigor. Because of the considerable record of his public life, the fight he has made (in part, in our name) to win the office he now holds, the President has a great claim upon us—because he has been instrumental in bringing about certain great changes in our national politics. But we must do better than to praise Ronald Reagan as a person or a political strategy—apart from what he has represented among us, at least since 1964. I so argue even while admitting that, in consequence of other, rightful priorities, we hope to be at liberty, in good conscience, to do precisely that. For otherwise, after his eight years, we must face the prospect of a totally politicized life, the threat of which drove most of us toward politics in the first place: politicized by a struggle in which only liberals and pragmatists are allowed to take a part, and everything is at stake.

From six years under Ronald Reagan what we have learned (apart from the persistence of the old tension between theory and practice) is how little is accomplished by winning elections. In that work conservatives have acquired genuine credentials. Curiously we are sometimes better at the game than the temporizers who once scorned us as impractical and ineffective. Our success on the hustings is a mirror image of the reluctance of candidates on the Left to admit, in these days, that they are liberals of any kind. I might also add that in learning the way of practical politics, conservatives also learned to

think better of our countrymen, especially those who are easily confused by the duplicity of political combat and the rhetoric of good intentions. There is no reason to be apocalyptic about the public virtue. But that information looks toward further electoral triumphs, not toward governing. Conservatives functioning *as conservatives*—men and women who thus described themselves long before there was advantage in doing so—must organize a White House and control much of the staffing in an administration before our political work is truly accomplished. Reaching that distant goal will require both patience and intellectual labor—effort needed to keep alive, in the face of general confusion, a clear definition of what we are about. For the moment our first priority is to refuse firmly and vigorously to surrender our hard-won identity to those who would use it as a cloak for policies contrary to what we intend. Lines of demarcation must be drawn, and swiftly.

Our other immediate problems are of a more familiar nature—distinctions as to what parts of our agenda of unfinished business need to be put at the head of the list if we hope to recover the inertia given to us by the elections of 1980 and 1984. To our critics who would measure us by what has happened since those great victories we must say that conservatism has proved up rather well where applied by the Reagan Administration but is, despite claims to the contrary by both enemies and *quondam* allies, otherwise a cordial or specific yet to be tested. How could it be fair to judge it by an imitation? Or by a caricature?

Though it is inevitable that conservatives not in government should advise our friends in office not to attempt too much, not to fight on all fronts at once, it is also necessary that on a selective basis we become openly critical of this government. Such candor is required, both for us and for them. Next we need to encourage the Administration to concentrate its surviving reserves of conservatism on judicial appointments—a job it is already doing very well. To reverse the modern trend in misinterpretation of the Constitution would work more effectively toward the counter-revolution of our expectations than any other measure that this Administration might take. In answer to the palpable absurdity of Justice Brennan's opinion that the intent of the Framers cannot be known, that the Constitution is a blank check, we need other judges who know better—and know it in places of equivalent authority. The connection between tyranny and well-meaning judicial activism, making up law merely because of what one thinks is right, must be reasserted. For to be a people under

law we must have a Constitution which limits what, through the law, may be attempted.

The rest of our present business, what we must do at once, is not difficult to identify. Conservatives are especially obliged to recover other portions of our nation's history of a more inclusive character than strictly legal history—portions distorted or hidden from us because our enemies realize that to control the past is to enjoin the future. Moreover we must remind some of our friends that religion consists of more than moral and ethical problems, as important as these are. And the list could be enlarged and extended in many other directions. The point I wish to make is not, however, a list but a distinction with respect to role: an insight drawn from the intellectual and spiritual genealogy of the position we should defend. Our first priority, as I said above, is intellectual, not topical. The analysis of assumptions in social, political and cultural theory is our primary task, now as before: analysis and then commentary with reference to the world around us. And to perform it we must leave only so much of our schedule for narrowly political considerations. Finally, we must concentrate on correcting what I have long insisted is the fundamental shortcoming of American conservatives, our indifference to the art of rhetoric, our inability to deal with the ostensibly benevolent simplicities of the adversary, who hopes to win with language what he lost at the polls. We have work enough to occupy all our ingenuity, regardless of the misconduct of any government in power. And then perhaps a little time for politics, which will do no harm, so long as we understand the priorities.

Undone by Victory: Political Success and the Subversion of Conservative Politics

There is a certain awkwardness in my situation as I begin this address. For before I say anything more, I must put down as a predicate my present dissociation from what has been, for over twenty years, the fond hope of my closest political associates; and, I must add, my own hope as well. On many occasions following President Reagan's first and surprising triumph of November 1980 and then again after his landslide re-election of 1984, I have listened to or read from discussions by journalists and historians, political scientists and pundits who took as their theme the line of demarcation, the watershed, in American political history which could be perceived as proceeding from the size and composition of the Reagan electorate, a sea change augured in their affirmation of a doctrine or program radically different from those enforced upon our countrymen by their ostensibly benevolent protectors during the last fifty years. However, even though the component parts of the Reagan constituency are still present within the national body politic—"out there"—ready to be called forth when properly solicited—and though few of the electors who were part of it in voting for President Reagan have changed their minds concerning the important issues of his two national campaigns, the disinterested assessment of the long-range implications of these events for our political future as a people has diminished with each passing day; and this lowering of expectations is apparent not merely to his adversaries or among self-appointed, self-proclaimed authorities but also to his friends and faithful followers who cannot understand why so little administrative use has been made of so much success at the polls. These erstwhile partisans have therefore lost much of their faith in the efficacy of electoral politics, no matter how large the

margin of victory their party might achieve; and they are thus disposed to turn away from public questions, toward private and interior methods of preserving the meaning of their lives. The kind of disenchantment which I detect at every hand implies, of course, no afterthoughts concerning Presidential preference. It is, however, a measure of how different from the incumbent may be the leaders of his party who come after him, and of how poorly they may be received when they present themselves to a voting public profoundly weary of managerial Presidencies.

But in prologue to anything further I might say about the *gestalt*, the structure of the Reagan Presidency as a less dramatic phenomenon than what we had expected, I should in fairness admit that its subversion by political success and electoral triumph has not been different in kind from what has happened throughout the modern era to other ambitious administrations not prepared to confront the machinery of government established in Washington City as the prophet Samuel confronted Agag, King of the Amalekites (I Samuel 15: 32–33); or with at least an approximation of such holy rigor. Yet, though this deflation in office is the same kind of attenuation that we have seen before, it has been different in the degree, the proportions of its unfulfilled promise, as measured against the enthusiasm of its most vigorous partisans. How support of the announced agenda of this government became a disadvantage for those who attempted (or wished) to carry it out by service in appointed office is a checkered story, and too complicated for tracing here. But I can suggest a few of its causes and consequences, using details of recent history—the public record; and a small narrative of my own experience.

The inceptional problem with the Reagan Administration is, of course, the process by means of which it has selected persons to fill the 6,093 slots available to its immediate disposition. I speak now of people ostensibly committed to carrying out the particulars of the Reagan Revolution. That many of these posts have gone to "pragmatists" and "Reaganites" (those "loyal to the President as a man"—whatever that means—but often unaware of or indifferent to his announced policies) goes without saying. The *Washington Post* in running in September of 1985 a series of articles on Conservatives in places of authority drew out this distinction between opposing species with great care. The division it describes is present in every government—was a besetting problem of the Carter White House, gave pause to Harry Truman, worried Jack Kennedy, broke the health of Woodrow Wilson, and

divided the cabinet of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It is the pervasive strength of the caretaker spirit visible in the selection of personnel for government service that is surprising in the Reagan White House, not the fact that it is present there and has a voice in making prudential decisions. Certainly it has had a powerful effect upon the Office of Presidential Personnel, which, under President Reagan, seems to be for the most part more interested in recommending untroublesome appointments than in suggesting nominees who might, at some cost in controversy, introduce earned distinction and commitment to principle into corners of the government where they have not been heretofore influential; and the same might be argued of personnel selection at lower echelons. Which is to say nothing about determinations of policy such as follow inevitably from the choice of staff.

Closely related to the difficulty of the Administration in selecting personnel and the softness in policy which comes of a reluctance to put its trust in decisive, high-profile supporters of the President's announced intentions is its correlative inability to secure Senate approval for appointees to the 584 jobs that require such confirmation. Thus far White House staff have not learned the art of translating the powers of the President into votes in support of his nominations; but, more important, there is no evidence of discipline among Senate Republicans (a problem which, to be sure, once troubled Democratic Presidents in dealing with Democratic Senators). Indeed, it appears that certain Senators feel themselves to be in no way threatened by the President's disfavor even if they deny his government officers needed to implement the doctrines ratified by the nation in his campaigns of 1980 and 1984. The White House is to blame for some of this dereliction—especially political staff. But their irresponsibility is nothing beside that of the United States Senate itself, which behaves as if it were at liberty, under the Constitution, to cancel the results of two general elections—the clearest expression of popular will given at the polls in our time. When I read of Senators who refuse to support a nominee of the President for a post in the Justice Department because the nominee agrees with the President's position—Republican Senators—I am reminded of one of the great Constitutional crises of the previous century, the contretemps brought on by the refusal of President Andrew Johnson to abide by the provisions of the Tenure of Office Act of March 2, 1867, legislation created by the "Radical Republicans" in Congress to prevent their President from employing the "servants" he required to execute his decisions. The putative moral superiority of the opinions of Senator Mathias can be no excuse for

legitimate government, obliged to absorb and neutralize successive waves of "mere politicians" brought to authority by the accidents of election. Even so, for reasons that go deeper than the usual explanations, these quondam realists have often been undone.

The greatest impediment to performance behind the failure of the Reagan regime to change the government delivered into its keeping for a root-and-branch reformation is that its constituent members have come to think of the status which they enjoy as theirs *by nature* and not by dint of political labor and popular delegation. Washington, as I have observed, causes them to forget why they acquired their offices, and under what conditions. Moreover, while they might wish to pacify their enemies, they have failed to support one another, coveting a respectability offered to them in the environment of the Capital by pretending to be "different from most Republicans" or "most Conservatives." The truth is, of course, that such respectability is granted only to those who agree that the Reagan Revolution is no more than a device of rhetoric and that only those positions held in common by President Reagan and President Ford can have a place in a responsible Republican government—allowing for small increases in defense, adjustments in fiscal policy, tepid leadership of the Free World in foreign policy and a little tinkering with the War on Poverty. There is a widespread belief among Reagan appointees that only a "soft" style of administration can effect changes which will be accepted because no one notices them until they are in place. According to these worthies, there can be no fundamental assault from the Right on the network of controls by which the state overgoverns almost every detail of our lives. The trouble with this teaching is that it is incongruous as a doctrine for counter-revolution. And the people expected nothing less from the elections of 1980 and 1984.

To illustrate the foregoing generalizations, I will tell you the personal story I promised a little earlier. In the small role which I perform as a member of the Board of Foreign Scholarships, I hear (with my eleven colleagues) regular discussions of the budget and outreach of the United States Information Agency, the division of the government which carries out our policy decisions concerning international exchanges of students and teachers and provides a necessary supporting staff. The agency is administered by Reagan loyalists who are known to share in the President's general philosophy. Yet I have heard from these appointed officers of the Administration no word about the need for retrenchment in a time of large public debt—but much concerning their delight at increase in funding likely to augment

the size of their little empires. In other words, they often seem to think like the civil servants they are supposed to direct. In treating their activities as ends in themselves they have left some members of the Board speechless; and other members (like myself) cynical and ironic. Only that honest patriot, Forrest McDonald, has spoken out plainly and refused to accept their version of things, and for his direct language, was received by those better accustomed to Washington doublethink with outright astonishment. It is true that, other things being equal, there are good arguments concerning the national interest for supporting most of these exchanges at some level of funding. But we must take great care lest we (and all our compatriots who serve as part of the present regime) become no more than what was called, in Forrest's beloved eighteenth century, a faction: a political combination no better than a conspiracy in restraint of trade, or a band of thieves.

What I would tell my friends in authority is that to restore the Reagan Revolution (as it now settles slowly within the Beltway) into what it was while on the campaign trail in 1976 and 1980, it will above all else be necessary to make and/or confirm some surprising appointments, to translate the still available political inertia into genuine political change. Furthermore, they must go on the offensive. We must insist on seeing in the place of the caretakers people better suited for garrison duty: men and women who regard the art of governing a state which is the embodied form of the political agenda they oppose as nothing less than a continuation of the struggle which gave administration into their hands, a winning of the battle to organize coming after the battle to be elected. Said another way, we must give up our hope of placating the enemy and concentrate instead on deserving the continued support of our oldest friends, on the political obligations to all the parts of the Reagan electorate that must be honored if our victories are to be more than what Lionel Trilling called (when speaking of conservative interludes in the dominant political pattern of his time) "irritable mental gestures," moments of impatience with some part of the grand design, soon concluded by a recovery of "reason" and "even temper."

Moreover, those of us who remember the origins of the hope we once entertained, the faith that politics could make a difference, must learn how to rebuff the adversary when his rhetoric denies priority to the common good—when, in the name of his favorite "god terms" which assume the absolute value of peace or tolerance or charity, he sets out to intimidate into silence our better judgment concerning a

particular issue. For the time we must continue to play the role of the *vir bonus*, the plain, blunt man, in insisting that no component of the President's support should be defrauded of its rightful share of attention and energy of this government. Furthermore, we must be clear about the moral superiority of practicing only the kind of loyalty to a President that follows from his announced opinions — as opposed to a loyalty that is empty of meaning and subject to the whims of the moment. For half a century Conservatives have had *no* function but to slow down the train, to modify here and there proposals initiated by the Left. We need now to make certain that we are more than an alternate crew for their out-of-date engine, and that the destination of our journey is quite different from the one our adversaries had in mind. Only then will our political activity bear fruit and result in something more than "business as usual," mendacity and mere opportunism, in the District of Columbia.

Where We Were Born and Raised: The Southern Conservative Tradition

In his memorable essay "A Southern Mode of the Imagination," the poet/critic Allen Tate observes of the region of his birth that its customary "mode of discourse" was not "dialectical"—defined by an interest in first causes and a disposition to seek the truth through refinements of definition or debate—but "rhetorical": reasoning from axiomatic or "assumed" principles, talking to (or pleading with) an audience which it hoped to influence or please.[1] From this distinction he continues in remarking that the serious literature of the modern South has been informed by a shift in sensibility among Southern intellectuals toward the "dialectical mode of discourse," reporting or rendering a conflict within, an argument or action in which the speaker reporting is "dramatically involved." According to this formula, since 1920 the characteristic activity of mind among Southern writers has been unsettled self-examination and questioning of premises merely inherited or prescribed *ad verecundiam* by the Fathers, the acknowledged "voices" of their culture. Though, for reasons which I have elsewhere detailed, I cannot accept Tate's calculus without first modifying it away from so much emphasis on contemporary "internal tension," I find it to be very useful in discussing the Southern conservative tradition—a position and/or attitude which is here distinguished from other conservative dispositions, and from mindsets part of the durable (and still persisting) mix of Southern thought, but not in any predictable way conservative.

The other text which I employ as a *point du départ* for this comment on Southern political attitudes is also distinguished but unsatisfactory in a way that is instructive. I refer to remarks found in the concluding

chapter of Richard M. Weaver's superb *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, where the North Carolina historian/political theorist/rhetorician argues that what the South has usually lacked "in its struggle against the modern world" has been a Thomas Aquinas or a Hegel to make "the indispensable conquest of the imagination" and arrive "at metaphysical foundations" for the region's "fundamental assumptions."[2] Weaver, who was himself a rigorous and principled conservative, speaks here as a man of systems, an admirer of Plato and a devotee of the argument from definition—but not as a representative of any Southern conservatism that we can recognize. For to follow his idealist recommendation and perfect a model of its archetypal self, the South would have to cease from being Southern and become instead "another country" more like New England than what it has been for the last three hundred years. For conservative regimes of a certain kind may, when confronted, produce a Burke or Calhoun—an answer to their critics which becomes, incidentally, a defense of their settled presumptions. But a culture which fosters *a priori* demonstrations of why it is "right *finally*" in its intellectual practice, social institutions, and ultimate objectives is not a conservative society of the variety achieved in the American South.[3] In explaining why this is true (while at the same time expanding on my objections to Tate's emphasis on the recent triumph of a dialectic among us), I may hope to find a way into exposition and analysis of what I mean by Southern conservatism, acknowledging all of its various incarnations and the fact that there are many durable features of the Southern configuration which are not persistently conservative in their impact on the region's behavior—features such as populism, a warlike disposition, a love of leisure, etc.

Weaver provides an answer to his own complaint against the unphilosophical bias of the Southern mind in his "Two Types of American Individualism," a comparison of the intellectual stance habitually adopted by that great eccentric, John Randolph of Roanoke, with the habit of mind illustrated by the career of that one-man republic, Henry David Thoreau of Massachusetts.[4] For in that essay he salutes the " 'social bond' individualism" of the Virginia statesman who scorned his enemies as "Jacobins" and "mere dialecticians; that is, men willing to crucify the conclusions of history and common sense upon some cross of logic."[5] Such men are, in Randolph's phrase, "disqualified . . . for the command of the councils of a country" by "long continuance of one pursuit . . . of one train of

ideas."[6] The *raisonneur*, the man of dialectic, according to this definition, lives inside his own conceptual universe and is indifferent to the restraints of contingency—until they break in upon his Cartesian dream. As for Tate, there is a plethora of textual evidence in the canon of his work to support the theory that he is the most conscious and persistent rhetorician among Southern writers of this or any previous century. To borrow from the language which he borrowed from Yeats, he made only a little of his poetry "out of a quarrel with himself." Like Weaver, Tate undermined in practice his own generalization about the value of dialectic—a sentiment which we should read as meaning no more than that Southerners would do well to understand positions other than their own: to imagine answers to their own regular arguments, alternatives (however mistaken) to the way they ordinarily react. In other words, Tate and Weaver fell back upon the rhetorical habit of mind because, as Southern conservatives, they had no choice in the matter, no real faith in the advantage of discourse that honors no authority but reason, no truth except the universal, no preference other than for restless innovation. But a better response to either of these historic rejections of the customary Southern equation of the rhetorical with the normative can be drawn from Richard Beale Davis's magisterial *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585–1763*.[7] Working outward from the antithesis of rhetoric/dialectic introduced with the texts from Tate and Weaver and deriving from the summary made by Davis of the original impetus of Southern thought, I can begin to draw a few distinctions concerning Southern conservatism in all of its forms, its persistence in following one path, preserving one nature and goal despite slow passage through a series of apparent transformations.

In his almost two thousand pages Davis demonstrates, among other things, that from the first the South had a civilization markedly different from that of New England; and that, though not in conflict with its English antecedents as were the Puritans, the result of the Southern errand into the wilderness was not precisely according to the model of the English rural society it hoped to replicate in a new setting. It was instead a modification brought into being not by a distinctive *telos* but rather incidentally, out of its English patrimony, in necessary adjustment to circumstances. Though not a New Jerusalem, neither was it a Kent nor a Wessex. Climate, vegetation, the aborigine, and simple distance from home prevented all such confusion, as did the presence of many elements in the colonial popula-

tion not frequently found in the English countryside: French and Swiss, and German, Scots, Irish, and Welsh—and, of course, the Negro. Reinforcing all of this conglomeration was the powerful experience of space, the remoteness of other human beings, and the necessity for building so many things, where very little was simply to be inherited. Finally, even in its colonial phase, the South governed itself in most aspects and reacted with alarm at any idea of distant, arbitrary and unfriendly authorities in control of its business.

Yet perhaps the primary value of Davis's book is that it puts finally to rest simplistic readings of the Southern character which trace everything that makes it distinctive to the presence of slavery. The South thought and acted in its own way *before* the peculiar institution was much developed within its boundaries. Colonial Southerners did not agonize in a fever of conscience over the injustice of the condition of those Negroes who were in bondage among them. Contrary to popular misconception, intense moral outrage at slavery was almost unheard of anywhere in the European colonies in the New World until the late eighteenth century, and was decidedly uncommon even then. The South embraced slavery in its colonial nonage because Negro slavery seemed to fit the region's needs—and because the region, through the combination of its intellectual inheritance brought over from the England of the Renaissance with the special conditions of this hemisphere, had reached certain practical conclusions. Spain and Portugal and the islands of the Caribbean had set for it a practical example. One of the distinctions of Davis's study is what little importance he attaches to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century preoccupations with these questions. With such tendentious anachronism he will have nothing to do. As he writes, " . . . it is difficult to see that in the slave colonies any consistent rationale if indeed any at all developed in defense of the peculiar institution, simply because there was not sufficiently powerful an attack upon it to warrant or require a defense."[8] As I have said before, slavery did not make the South conservative, but it (and the freedman after slavery was ended) helped to keep it that way. Though loyal to its distant king, it was already, in its beginnings, republican, but without a general theory to describe its practice: undogmatically, coincidentally, republican; and therefore tolerant of a few king's officers and placemen—of a few garrisons to watch the pirates and the Indians and ward off the French—but utterly impatient with inclusive theories concerning the *a priori* rights of princes or subjects so characteristic of the dogmatic politics of seventeenth-century England. Such was the rule with both public and

private men, whatever the exceptions so interesting to scholars of this more ingenious time.

But if the colonial South was a slightly more republican variant version of rural England, subsisting without a nobility and without a strong religious establishment, living with the innovation of black slavery that, despite an un-English originality, "was not a major influence" on its "thinking," what habits of thought strong enough to mark the region's history for more than three hundred and fifty years could be expected to develop in its context?[9] And why did they so develop and so long survive in this particular setting? Davis expands upon a few of these persistent components of the Southern mind in his peroration—a joy in the gifts of life, a horror of ideology, a penchant for arguments based on precedent and history (*from* circumstances), and a certain reasonableness or flexibility in the approach to questions of policy.[10] These qualities have an intelligible relationship and may be expected to cooperate to produce a unified effect. When operating in unison, they foster what Tate calls "the rhetorical mode" or view of the world: a vision of things according to which certain questions are settled before any serious deliberation concerning a preferred course of conduct may begin.

Prudent, prescriptive and somewhat worldly people, immigrants who have come to cultivate the land and enjoy the bounty of nature through an adaptation of familiar forms, are not likely to employ what the older rhetoricians called the *oraculum* (i.e., "talking for the gods") or to make broad general statements concerning universal human nature—statements that require periodic root-and-branch reformations of established modes and orders—in apporaching prudential decisions. For such people, reality tends to be external, not subjective. They are like Rooney Lee, the satiric target of Davis's *bête noire*, Henry Adams, in that Brahmin's autobiography.[11] But, as Adams refused to believe, deliberative discourse—non-theoretical discussion of buildings to be built, crops to be harvested, soldiers to be led, and practical problems to be solved—is no less "cerebration" than endless and disruptive prying into "first principles" and big "Ideas": the Puritan habit of mind that is inappropriate in a regime ruled by law, a constitutional order. Settled questions need not be belabored. Yet though they may not choose to speak of these things, it is not to be expected that extroverted, non-theoretical men will forfeit the comfort available in an *inherited* religion or an *inherited* political identity once they have settled in a strange and dangerous new land. Indeed, their deepest commitments are likely to remain unstated. Though not so

abstractly philosophical as to put it in this way, they will accept their roles as Christians and Englishmen on *authority*, finding security and identity in that acceptance; and therefore, if necessary, they will be prepared to make a revolution if that tenuous security is threatened from within or without.

Which brings me finally to Davis's teaching on what it is that Southerners once wished to preserve: on the highest flowering of the culture of the colonial South, its public men, and their role in the creation of the Republic. I have already mentioned most of the important elements in his explanation of that breed. The rest I will draw from the epilogue to his massive work. At the highest level, the original Southern mind sought in this world what Leo Marx has called the "cultivated garden," a "middle ground."[12] The impulse behind this dream has always been agrarian—defined by the acquisition and cultivation of land, "real property." Southerners came here not so much to find Eden as a freehold—larger than what they might have hoped for "back home." Theirs was a mindset which presumed a culture of families, not the atomistic individual in the modern sense. It was, in its origins, a literate and religious perspective, informed by a sense of the past, a modest view of human nature, touched by irony and humor and modest hopes. And it assumed the goodness of creation, even though stewardship would be required to make the most of individual blessings. Furthermore, most of what I have said here in speaking of the gentry obtains for other freemen and citizens—minus a little classical decoration. Southern conservatism as I treat of it here grew out of this matrix of attitudes, to which it is *sui generis*. What was Southern and differed from it was not fully conservative.

Thus to speak in general terms of the prototypical Southern conservative we would say first of all that he was not an alienated man. From the kind of consciousness which sees the self only in relation to something that is "other" he fought shy; or else hurried quickly to Hegel's third stage—of purposeful reunion with the inclusive whole. Reasoning as he does, the rhetorician, with respect for the context which makes the question possible, asked of men and measures, "*Quem patrem*?" (What fathers?); and looked within, in a fit of introspection, only to check himself against the dangers of enthusiasm and/or spiritual presumption.[13] The carriers of this tradition were men of family, incorporated men, who did not get "too good for their raisin' ": did not imagine their identity or freedom as a condition outside of (or antecedent to) the network of extended families defined by

links of blood, marriage, religion, and cooperation in common enterprise (*qua* history) that made up society—the network for the sake of which they believed the state existed. From the high road which leads to a "faraway country" and from the topless heights of the "imperial self" they kept their distance, and thus avoided some of the Faustian temptations contained within the ambitious, proud example of most Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Romantic thought: the equation, in a series of historic steps, of personhood with will, intellect, and sensibility.

To what was good for the *patria* this eighteenth-century conservative revolutionary (who had made a revolution in order to preserve a familiar way of life) gave his assent: to policies calculated to shore up the regime, even if the immediate implications of these measures appeared to strengthen the authority of government or threaten local autonomy, the control over their own lives which he and his friends hoped to preserve by acting together against levellers, Indians, and the champions of *fiat* money.

For a public and private doctrine, a "principle," this taproot conservative followed not an assertion of propositional truth but rather a pious determination to prefer a given world, a *societas*, which guaranteed his rights as a kind of Englishman or American republican, to a positive political model, a universal teaching on justice and love, liberty and equality, peace, and honor.[14] Instead of the rigor of deracination and alienation summed up in Descartes's "*Cogito, ergo sum*," he cherished a clear sense of what Southern grandmothers have always meant in admonishing children, "we don't do that": a prescription able to survive numerous violations, grounded in the memory of "where [and how] we were born and raised." In this feature of his disposition we should discover the explanation of the Southern conservative's notorious reluctance to take seriously either doctrinaire egalitarianism or its antitype, doctrinaire libertarianism, and the reason why he renounced the protection of the Crown when he could find no other way to preserve his political patrimony, what Patrick Dollard of South Carolina referred to as his "birthright" under Magna Carta.[15] Such sentiments were common just before the Revolution. What is interesting about Dollard's speech is that it was made not in 1775 in Boston but in May 1788 in a debate concerning the proposed United States Constitution occurring in the South Carolina ratification convention. In this instance Dollard spoke as did William Henry Drayton and Patrick Henry in insisting that the

American separation from England was a constitutional act within a larger English political tradition, made in the English political tradition, made in the name of self-preservation for the legitimate status of an extant order: a repetition of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, not an innovation.[16] Or, as Edmund Burke contended, "not a revolution, but a revolution prevented." For, once George III withdrew his protection and branded them outlaws, they were obliged to return his accusation—or else embrace either the tyranny of arbitrary will or what the English political theorist Michael Oakeshott (a thinker I find to be especially valuable in explaining the conduct of Southerners) calls "teleological politics"—defined by purposes, not methods.[17]

Thus it is (as I have often argued) that with the achievement of American independence nothing had really changed except the official connection with Great Britain. Though the number of Americans active in politics had increased, the sense of political participation and a stake in political results, there had been, in the South, no vast internal revolution, no return to a state of nature, no reconstitution of the self-governing, chartered communities that seceded from a larger English whole, taking their past with them—just as they took public buildings, forts, churches and the open lands westward from the mountains. The "they" of whom I speak had become a larger, more inclusive communion, but its behavior was the same—in a situation both patriarchal and republican, in which more men might be jealous of their personal honor, their earned standing in the greater scheme of things, and the regime be made stronger by their inclusion in the political calculation, the authority of the great chieftains more secure.[18] A measure of this unchanging disposition may be drawn from any number of sources. But the best evidence comes from the reaction of Southerners to simplistic interpretations of the Declaration of Independence as these emerged out of American reactions to the French Revolution, Federalist squabbles with the Jeffersonians and early anti-slavery agitation. At any inclination to take seriously the claims of natural-rights theory or to abstract such implications from the example of our first war for independence they took swift exception.

In the reactions of Southern conservatives to the Declaration of Independence I find a broad division into two camps. One school of thought sees in "created equal" an aberration, an unfortunate outburst overlooked by the Signers (who intended that Jefferson write nothing of this sort), a bomb perpetually ticking in the basement of the citadel of republican liberty—a fortification raised by the very tenor of the Constitution. This is essentially a Federalist view of the anomaly of

Mr. Jefferson's radicalism—a view John C. Calhoun learned at Yale and from the faculty of Tapping Reeve's law school at Litchfield, Connecticut: that Jefferson's language in asserting that we are "created equal" presumed the origin of human rights in a presocial, apolitical vacuum. In the idiom of Calhoun's *Disquisition on Government*, "great and dangerous errors have their origin in the prevalent opinion that all men are born free and equal—than which nothing can be more unfounded or false."[19]

According to Calhoun, these errors of Jefferson "began to germinate" long after the writing of the Declaration, but did not flower for many years.[20] Henry Lee IV (Black Horse Harry) used a related but even more powerful image to take Jefferson's language as a generalization about individuals: "Institutions founded on such generalities and abstractions . . . are like a splendid edifice built upon kegs of gunpowder."[21] Lee's vehemence in speaking of the Declaration as "aborescently fallacious" is another instance of that line of conservative reaction to the document which agrees essentially with what liberals and other meliorists have always made of its text. John Randolph of Roanoke sounded essentially the same note, that the principles of the Declaration as "almost invariably received" are "false and pernicious."

Though he called his cousin "St. Thomas of Cantingbury," John Randolph also suggested another way of construing his most famous words, a reading of the Declaration less ridiculous than most.[22] Which leads me to remark the other conservative gloss upon that document—a gloss which incorporates the entire instrument of separation from the Mother Country *inside* the Southern conservative tradition. This was, conventionally, the view of the question adopted by the spokesmen and leaders of the Democratic Party in the years before the War Between the States—including such representative Northern Democrats as Franklin Pierce and Stephen A. Douglas. I have, in another context, defended it myself in some detail.[23] Its foundation lies in the record of American political history (and the conduct of the Signers) after 1776 and certain related generalizations concerning human nature. There and in the unphilosophical conception of the rights of freemen and citizens rooted in the English common-law tradition to which the entire Declaration as a rhetorical structure, a formal pleading, belongs: a pleading against the necessity for submission to tyranny.

Governor Edmund Randolph of Virginia, another cousin of Jefferson, summarizes this argument against *philosophe* construction in

his *History of Virginia* in telling the story of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, in which we read, among other things, that "all men are by nature equally free and independent . . . when they enter a state of society." Randolph deplores the language of the predicate to that other Declaration written in Philadelphia the following July as being too broad, "with too great an indifference to futurity."[24] For everyone who had a hand in it knew that no more in the way of rights was promised than what "every body and individual came into the Revolution with . . . to continue to enjoy them as they existed under the former government."[25] But no more than familiar liberty, what even Calhoun affirmed: "that equality of citizens, in the eyes of the law," concerning the few situations covered by the law, with all else being a local question, or the business of society, not of the state. Or else the substantial rights of communities: that "all men in their national, or state capacity, were equally entitled, and equally at liberty, to rid themselves of oppression, and act for themselves—a right which as individual citizens, they did not possess and could not exercise, as against established government."[26] And no pretext of "civil convulsion," "balloon morality" or "foolish and mischievous speculation" disguised as general feeling.[27]

It is, of course, a contradiction of the view of the Declaration as a deferred commitment to create an equality of political or civil rights among the inhabitants of the states that the Signers did not speak of it in those terms and did nothing to implement that construction of its letter. And we may note in passing that the same text makes a variety of noises (about Indians, foreigners, offenses against the blood and servile insurrections) that consorted not at all well with the philosophical version of "created equal." Moreover, another correction of the same interpretation is in the obvious fact that responsible men do not thus encumber their posterity—their children and their friends. Temperate persons behave another way, respecting the given reality of their world, the impossibility of creating by government either equality *per se* or equality of opportunity. But the most interesting response to the assertion of natural theology in what Jefferson wrote in 1776 is in what he wrote and said elsewhere—especially in his 1787 *Notes on the State of Virginia*.[28]

As I have argued heretofore, what is most noteworthy about the only book Thomas Jefferson ever wrote is that it is not about the individual, Thomas Jefferson, or the rights of man but about the definitive (and confining) characteristics of the Virginia, the commonwealth, within which its author could exist. This Jefferson never

forgets the extant order, the ineluctabilities of meridians and miles, names, dates, and documents which are the form of his subject: a regime less than malleable, whose corporate character gives protection and support to his own individuality—on the condition that he never overdo it, never forget that, as he wrote Du Pont de Nemours, "What is practicable must control what is pure theory; and the habits of the governed [his yeomen neighbors] determine in great degree what is practicable."[29] In other words, the total form of the *Notes* is not *philosophe* or romantic (despite the fact that its addressee, François Marquis de Barbe-Marbois, is a sentimental philosopher) but rhetorical and Southern—at first a filiopietistic answer to the Count de Buffon's insult against North America as a debilitating place, then a survey of the given history and law, the limits, boundaries and dimensions of his "country." The legal, social and economic entity, the intellectual atmosphere that is Virginia, is not a creation according to the school of strict reason, or a lyrical exercise in self-consciousness. The famous condemnation of slavery in Query XVIII and the praise of agrarian simplicity in the following section of the work are not its heart, but rather what rhetoricians call the *concessio*: a release of hopes and fears which Jefferson means "as a sentiment," a nod to his French friends—and to that part of himself that agrees with them. But the qualifying context surrounding these flights is also meant, showing a mind linked in consanguinity with what might, in Jefferson's case, have become the equivalent of Hegel's "other." Might, but—with apologies to my friend Lewis Simpson—did not.[30] As Professor Peterson has told us, the real Thomas Jefferson had a "horror of self-styled guardians of the public interest" who are "heedless of the historic fabric of law and opinion."[31] So long as such a fabric was in place, he would honor it, except perhaps in the matter of religion. And even there he troubled himself to remain a member of the local vestry and aspired to retain the good opinion of the squires of Albemarle, the freeholders who were his primary audience, and the explanation of why he was reluctant to publish his book. With these freeholders in mind, what Virginia expected of him, he continued all of his life to be quiet about "implicit promises" buried in the complex structure of the Declaration.[32]

* * *

Southern conservatism—the cultural and political result of the region's awareness of an adversary threatening it from the outside,

came into being during the American Revolution: a conservatism which presupposed the worth and merit of an established "way" being preserved. Before 1774 there was no forensic structure to make such an awareness possible. This native conservatism had the style and idiom of English Whig legalism and was, first of all, a reflex of the American quarrel with the abuses of British authority. Then, with independence accomplished, this same conservatism became one side in the conflict of the sections which is the intellectual backbone of American history: the original division into the friends and the enemies of "energetic government." Secession and another war of independence were the issue of this informing tension; and, as these reactive developments were followed by conquest and the rule of a conquering host (the essence of Reconstruction, as experienced by the "reconstructed," whatever we think of what it should have been), they also strengthened the hold on the mind of the Confederate South of its *nomos*, its determination to keep faith with a prescription for which so many good men had died: firmed up in the character of the region its sense of being "still besieged" or "in captivity," of providential call and function in preserving a distinctively Southern civil religion against the apostasy ("isms"—a perpetually reconstructive calculus) fostered by the "perfidious enemy."[33] Yet conquest and defeat also cast a pall over this pious determination—a gloom reinforced by the apolitical attitude toward all worldly institutions encouraged by the same rapid growth in the Evangelical denominations that, after 1800, had sealed off the South from the influence of Yankee dialectics, values understood apart from their embodiment in a specific order: a growth that, in the devotion of these churches to the exfoliation of an *authoritative* gloss on an *authoritative* text, made the South more and more immune to "vain philosophy" and reinforced its rhetorical habit of mind.[34] However, in the same war, defeat, ruin, and isolation, the region's sense of its own distinctiveness, cultivated for seventy-two years within the United States and seared forever into its memory by the test of battle, found a memorable occasion for public display and thus discovered its completed form. Finally, since 1878, the status, in its natural setting, of Southern conservatism has been complicated by the presence within the fortress of a persistent respectable rival, a fifth column inside the tribe, a creedal adversary in the struggle over the future course to be followed by the *patria*.

I do not speak here of internal exiles or of those who have ostracized themselves—always a small number among Southerners of any

generation previous to my own. For with the appearance of a counter-force "within the family," the idea of a South whose being is a non-negotiable given, anterior to its meaning, continues to be accepted. The *Gemeinschaft* is intact, and no one runs a risk of being disowned, of "spitting on their grandfather's grave."[35] And because the language of deracination, alienation and discontinuity is avoided by most of its representatives, this movement for reform without dissolution has had, since 1918, much of the inertia in the conflict over regional identity on its side—reform in this context signifying an application of arguments from definition, made without regard to history, to proposals which would divert the South from the course which it has followed since colonial times by drastically redefining what is essential to that inheritance. This type of anxious piety had, however, no part in the root-and-branch reconstitution of the universe of discourse inhabited by Southerners which came with the Second Reconstruction of the 1960's. Like its prototype, this effort failed to bring about all of the changes some had hoped to see it produce—failed, in part, because it proceeded on the assumption that only a special policy with respect to blacks made the South different; and because it drew much of its impetus from a new surge of external pressure washing up against the protective breakwaters of the regime. Thus, curiously, after an unbroken series of predictions of its imminent demise and many changes in its venue or agenda (in the kinds of challenges it chose to confront as dangers to its integrity), the older Southern conservatism (which is not much akin to the conservatism of "throne and altar," the conservatism of the market economists, or even the conservatism of judicial restraint [though that one comes close]), the species grown "in the soil" of the region's colonial experience (but not made in the minds of "thinkers") is still around, still the only path available for those who hope for security *within* the larger Southern tribe, still a vital *nomocratic* force in the nation's public life.[36]

If the language concerning equality as it appears in the Declaration is the great instance of modernist political abstraction, dialectical generalization, in Southern political thought, the exception that measures the rule, then reaction to it, coming as it does from the political "saint" of our civil theology, is still the acid-test of Southern conservatism. And if even Mr. Jefferson, the source of that language, is a little vague about the status of natural-rights doctrine among us, then that conservatism is very strong indeed: an apprehension of the given world that is at once pious and non-ideologically devoted to the

corporate liberty; patriarchal in a way that restrains the private judgment while at the same time honoring a deeply Protestant religious sense which, while doubting the possibility of a natural theology, looks instead for a definition of intellectual pride to a rhetorician's gloss or commentary on a mysterious sacred book—a "given" Word.

In this conservatism both anti-rationalism and a suspicion of *a priori* propositions are antecedent to (and an explanation of) opposition to particular systems of reform—the national bank, the protective tariff, socialism, mesmerism, abolition, feminism, mental health, pacifism, or any of the other forms the dialectical habit of mind might assume. From 1787 until 1865 the South came together in its quarrel with the now-popular view of the Declaration—the view which sees in it much more than a promise of equality before the law, in the matters covered by that law. And, as Dean Cooper has told us, it was consistent with its own reading of that text that many Southern leaders invoked the example of the Signers in declaring for a secession of their own, believing they had not changed at all, in rejecting Federal authority.[37] Yankees were summarized and explained by their uneasy, reluctant construction of the Declaration. Of course, they knew better than to believe in nonsense; but because of a different orthodoxy, they were often unable to bring themselves to give up on the immigrant dream that there could be both equality of opportunity and liberty of action—to accept the truth that only people who have been made identical can experience equal opportunities. In the memorable phrase of Alcibiades Jones, Yankees, after the war, insisted officially on "the pestiferous doctrine of equality carried to its legitimate conclusion."[38] And they were equally as firm about the doctrine of individual liberty, but were, as Weaver held, confused about what to do with these irreconcilable terms, often reluctant to invoke them in private. Some have argued that Southerners long maintained their own absolute terms—"god terms" in Weaver's rhetorical lexicon. Or so it seemed to any honest observer who took note of repetitious Southern affirmations of liberty published in the last three centuries, even if only the liberty of entire societies is intended by these adventures with the epideictic categories of praise and blame, these polarized embodiments of the embattled collective self. Yet Southerners on liberty have historically only appeared to be ideological, as I will attempt to explain.

* * *

It is now the fashion of the scholarship to emphasize the republicanism of earlier generations of white Southerners. Republics were commonwealths that set great store by their own independence and the freedom of their citizens from any restraint except that of the law. The paradox of fair cries of liberty emanating from slaveholders has exercised the interpretive skills of some of our best historians, and rightfully so. But the liberty valued by historic Southern conservatism was not primarily individual liberty, as guaranteed by political authority; neither was it the kind of *idée fixe* propounded in the doctrine of certain contemporary libertarians or the liberty enforced by the authority of the state, as with some modern varieties of Federalism. Rather, it was a corporate liberty, one that both protected and ignored family and tribe—the *societas*—preventing the imposition upon them of an ideological politics, leaving them to be unofficially Tory about questions of social order, to work out their own destiny under God. From the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798—from the warnings of the Antifederalists even earlier in 1788—through the general elections of 1980 and 1984, the Southerner's devotion to liberty has been of this kind: offering no check upon local reactions against untoward displays of free agency. Patrick Henry spoke for this kind of liberty, and in the Richmond debates on the ratification of the United States Constitution praised it as a "jewel," allowing Virginians to make "short work" of the bushwhacker Josiah Philips: a liberty which leaves what the Framers called "local police" in local hands.[39] In other words, the South has continued to be in some sense republican because it responds to the challenges of the world as does a rhetorician: as I said before, undogmatically, coincidentally republican, according to some notion of what is good for the regime, useful in protecting its cohesive force—but not abstractly republican, according to the authority of a principle to be honored, regardless of consequences. Inside the republican framework a culture of families, linked by friendship, common enemies, and common projects, might flourish and generate in a stable population something like a tribe. Within the boundaries of that bond Southerners, if conservative, would put second to their desire to belong any hope they might have for fame or victory or the heady experience of being right. They could be expected to make choices which seemed to be in conflict with pure republican doctrine: favor dry laws, farm subsidies, right-to-life amendments, racial restrictions on private business, or (as did some of the Nashville Agrarians in the 1930's) distribution into freeholds of lands con-

fiscated by government after failure to pay taxes; even favor suspension of payment of debts, as did the gentry of South Carolina after the Revolution—so long as the probable consequences of these measures taken *in extremis* were restorative of the regime *as it had been*, or of its power to survive. What the Southern conservative stands for, advocates as a worthwhile policy, has thus shifted constantly—in a fashion that has been, incidentally, a source of humor among many Southerners (see Faulkner's speech to the planters of the Mississippi Delta);[40] has shifted thus in prudential matters, despite a sustained and *almost constant* concern with the securities of self-government, as I have explained that doctrine; but, like the rhetorician, shifts not at all in its hold on its own, the ground from which it moves; or in its recollection that any liberty we could want would have value only if enjoyed within the social bond—that there is something uncivilized about starting from scratch when asking "What is to be done?"

* * *

What is the status of this indigenous conservatism within the region as we know it today? For one thing, it is free to appear as more than racial feeling, as conservatism *per se*, because it is less preoccupied with problems of race than at any time since 1820. When I have spoken of Southerners in these remarks, I have, most obviously, meant "white Southerners who are conservatives," though not always, then or now. I think of blacks acting with conservatives in a recent referendum on "gay rights" in Houston; of black leadership in the restoration of neighborhood schools in Dallas and Fort Worth, Norfolk and Little Rock; of black participation in the effort to preserve sumptuary laws or restrict Federal intrusions in the affairs of the oil and gas business in my state. Blacks are sometimes Southern conservatives—even though they call it something else. But race, of course, continues to matter among Southerners, white and black and brown. We all know that Charles Roland of the University of Kentucky told us the truth about our world when he argued a few years ago that the color line still exists—though not in a way easily accessible to correction by statute or exhortation.[41] Moreover, the changes of the last two decades have created new situations to make us aware of the powerful importance of racial sensitivities to the behavior of a regime that both does and does not include the Southern black. I am thinking here of the reaction of the sleeping giant of Southern folk conservatism to the campaign of the Reverend Jesse Jackson. I think we know where all of

this action/reaction will lead in the sphere of partisan politics. We have been there before. Racial co-existence will, in the foreseeable future, continue to be for all Southerners a matter of continuous and delicate renegotiation. These transactions are still a factor in precluding the rise of egalitarianism among Southern conservatives; or for that matter in restraining enthusiasm among them for any *a priori* notions of justice. But the problems of co-existence and of adjustment to compulsory association have also made the Southern conservative more at ease with his position on these questions than other Americans are likely to be. We might recall in this connection the story told by Lee Iacocca (in his recent autobiography) of Henry Ford, II and doublethink in high places.[42] Hypocrisy is no basis for social peace. Lip service often hides the persistence of old assumptions. I am more impressed by the pleasure I have seen white conservatives take in the genuine achievements of black students, black professionals, and a black middle class than I am by politically motivated protestations of affected tolerance. Southern conservatives will continue to be conservative about race and "racial revolutions," but not primarily because of race.

Although Southern conservatism has been and still is able to absorb and survive great changes in the laws affecting race relations in the region, other more serious causes of its attenuation and possible decline have appeared in the pattern of contemporary Southern life. In the *societas* values are discovered over time, out of the voluntary practice of private association. Every now and then I see instances that remind me of what force it once enjoyed among us. In Dallas two friends of mine (bachelor brothers) keep a hardware store left to them by their father. In every sense of the word they serve their neighborhood. A few months ago they posted a notice that they were relocating the store in an effort to deal with inflation and that any help in the move would be appreciated. About thirty of their longtime friends and customers responded. Reading this story in the *Dallas Morning News*, I rejoiced that in a little pocket of East Dallas the traditional community is alive and well.

The cement which makes possible this cohesiveness is the stability of family life within an identifiable population. Mobility and television and the sound of Yankee voices on the evening news all gnaw away at the foundations of the regime, but not in the way that the breakup of both the extended and the nuclear family, especially in Southern cities, threatens the continuity of life as Southerners have known it since the seventeenth century. Single-parent families, when

too commonplace, put a strain on the integrity of the regime more serious than General Sherman achieved at his worst; and the end result of such nurture is likely to be atomistic man, heretofore an anomaly on the Southern scene. For the moment I see no real reversal of this trend, though one great force continues to propel the population of the South back toward more familiar patterns of behavior—that force which does more than any other to preserve the original character of Southern conservatism among us.

For we are still in some sense as Richard Weaver described us thirty years ago, "the last non-materialist civilization in the Western world," a people defined by the presence of a powerful (if pluralistic) Protestant establishment among us: an establishment which can be called forth to do battle with its ancient enemies with very little provocation. The political effect of this establishment on the public life of the region follows from its primary concern with the life of the spirit and the faith of the Gospel; and most assuredly is this true of its Fundamentalist wing, where an apolitical preoccupation with redemption has direct political consequence in preventing what Weaver calls an "egocentric attachment to an idea." Around the continuity in the life of the Southern churches gather for support and derivative authority all the other branches of the inherited prescription. They are the basis of a civil theology that is both civil (political) and a theology—the "old-time religion" of the folk hymn, good for Paul and Silas, parents and grandparents—an inheritance, not a private discovery.

NOTES

1. Allen Tate, "A Southern Mode of the Imagination," *Essays of Four Decades* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1968), pp. 577–92. I have responded in "That Other Republic: *Romanitas* in Southern Literature," pp. 17–28 of my *Generations of the Faithful Heart: On the Literature of the South* (La Salle, IL: Sherwood Sugden and Co., 1983).

2. See p. 389 of Richard Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1968), eds. George Core and M. E. Bradford.

3. *Ibid.*

4. "Two Types of Individualism," pp. 65–97 of Richard Weaver's *Life Without Prejudice and Other Essays* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1965).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

7. Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585–1763*, 3 vols. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1978).

8. *Ibid.*, p. 1630.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 1571.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 1647–1653.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 1643–1644.

12. See p. 87 *et seq.* of Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (New York: Oxford Press, 1964); see also Davis, p. 1637.

13. See p. 36 of Jan Lewis's *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1953); see also p. 171 of Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

14. See William J. Cooper, Jr., *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), p. 14, for a discussion of the non-theoretical quality of the devotion to liberty commonly expressed in the Old South.

15. See p. 337 of vol. 4 of Jonathan Elliot's *The Debates in the Several States on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution as Recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia in 1787* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1974). Merrill D. Peterson in his *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 89, quotes as evidence supporting the theory of continuity historian George Gibbs: "What the people wanted, and what they took up arms to get, was not some new privilege, some new liberty, but the security of rights, privileges and immunities, which they had always had."

16. See pp. 111–33 and 97–110 of *A Better Guide Than Reason: Studies in the American Revolution* (La Salle, IL: Sherwood Sugden and Co., 1979) for my essays on Drayton and Henry. See also several related essays on early American politics in my *Remembering Who We Are: Observations of a Southern Conservative* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985).

17. Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 203–06.

18. Cooper, p. 24.

19. See p. 63 of *Calhoun: Basic Documents* (State College, PA: Bald Eagle Press, 1952), ed. John M. Anderson, for the appropriate passage from the *Disquisition.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 295, from the June 1848 Debate on the Oregon Bill.

21. Quoted from Lee's *Observations on the Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Philadelphia, 1839), on p. 54, vol. 2 of Albert J. Beveridge's *Abraham Lincoln, 1809–*1858 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928).

22. See pp. 45 and 157 of Russell Kirk's *John Randolph of Roanoke: A Study in American Politics* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1964).

23. See pp. 29–57 and 185–203 of *A Better Guide Than Reason.*

24. See p. 253 of Edmund Randolph's *History of Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1970).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 256. This reflects the opinion of most members of the convention.

26. Quoted from Daniel K. Whitaker of South Carolina, p. 165 of Peterson's *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind.*

27. Robert E. Shalhope, *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 142, 145.

28. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), ed. William Peden. What I say here on this work summarizes an argument developed in further detail in *A Better Guide Than Reason: Studies in the American Revolution,* pp. 137–52.

29. Jefferson to Du Pont de Nemours, January 18, 1802.

30. Lewis P. Simpson, "The Ferocity of Self: History and Consciousness in Southern Literature," *South Central Review,* I (Spring/Summer, 1984), 67–84. How one achieves (in the language borrowed by Simpson in echoing Lionel Trilling's borrowing from Hegel) the relation of self to other—to an "opposing self"—by sending all freedmen "home" to Africa I cannot see. Jefferson insisted on that corollary to Negro freedom (see Peden's edition, p. 143).

31. See pp. 111 and 703 of Peterson's *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

32. And urged his disciples in Virginia to do likewise.

33. The phrase is Andrew Lytle's.

34. See Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in the Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

35. Quoted from p. 56 of Robert Penn Warren's *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South* (New York: Random House, 1956).

36. I develop this notion of a "*societas*" in "Conclusion: Not in Memoriam, But in Affirmation," pp. 212-23 of *Why the South Will Survive* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981), by Fifteen Southerners. By "nomocratic," I refer to an order in which members are not partners or colleagues in an enterprise with a common interest to promote or protect, but are instead related in terms of a practice, a common way.

37. See p. 285 of Cooper: "As Confederates they could and did believe they had not changed at all." See also p. 337 of John McCardell's *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979): "The Confederacy, created to restore constitutional rights, would have as its purpose conservation and not innovation."

38. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, p. 157.

39. Elliot's *Debates*, III, p. 140.

40. "To the Delta Council," pp. 126-34 of *William Faulkner: Essays, Speeches and Public Letters* (New York: Random House, 1965), ed. James B. Meriwether.

41. See Charles P. Roland, "The Ever-Vanishing South," *Journal of Southern History*, XLVIII (Feb., 1982), 3-20.

42. *Iacocca: An Autobiography* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), p. 110.

Is the American Experience Conservative?

Having recently urged upon my fellow conservatives the necessity for attaching a priority to distinctions and definitions, having in the *Intercollegiate Review* insisted that such exercises are properly antecedent to all questions of policy, I was obliged to attempt a reflection on this theme when Mr. Hart proposed it to me. Moreover, this place, this institution, devoted as it is to the immediate prudential questions which confront a government, session by session, day by day, is an appropriate setting for my remarks on the American experience read large. For there is no useful prescription to be drawn from that record if it cannot be translated for the here and now—brought forward for application to the ongoing business of the Republic. Therefore I am gratified by both the assignment and the context, and will try to bring the two together according to the canons of rhetoric given to me by my Southern preceptors, men who honored no deracinated truth and tolerated no speech indifferent to the audience for which it was prepared.

A great part of the answer to the question posed by my title can be drawn from the beginnings of the American experience in the first 150 years after the coming of Europeans to the shores of North America. Furthermore, the reason that my response is (with certain qualifications) in the affirmative is because we had such a good start and drew so much momentum from the pattern established here with the creation and development of the various colonial regimes which were antecedent to our composite independence as a nation. Recognition of this pattern as continuing to operate among us to this day is a predicate to my conviction that the original American experience was on the whole conservative in both its essential and its accidental properties.

It is fundamental to my understanding of the American heritage that our earliest forefathers, those who settled the country, came here to acquire land and the status of freeholder—distinctions of the first order of importance in the European societies which they left behind them. They sought what the law still calls "real property," recognizing the connection between personal self-respect and such ownership—the impossibility of achieving the status of freeman or citizen without "locating the blood." Professor Bernard Bailyn's recent work in *The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction* (see pp. 32 ff.) and *Voyages to the West* has begun to document much of this process, to tell us of the motives of the colonists who came this way in great expectation. In a word, they were, once Americans, determined to be from somewhere—an objective not adequately described by speaking of the commercial spirit of America or a commitment to economic liberty. I so maintain even though Americans did generally prefer free enterprise—once they had their land grants and a political structure which allowed them to protect such holdings. It is to my point that the Swiss, though not at that time rich, had their own domain. This fact was not separable from their status as a nation of freeholders, or from the respect which they enjoyed among the nations.

Another feature of colonial American life which planted among us the proper inertia toward liberty and order, under God and in law, is the failure of a series of English kings to set up among us a peerage, a viceregal court, and a fully established church—an episcopacy. These omissions, combined with the remoteness of final authority and the disposition of the Crown to leave British America to govern itself in all things local (everything apart from imperial economic and foreign policy) had guaranteed that we would not have here the kind of revolution against unearned privilege and violations of conscience that tore European society apart in the 17th and 18th centuries. We were republican long before we were a Republic. In British North America life meant self-defense (the citizen soldier) and work. It subsumed a connection between worth and effort. The gentleman, as we know the social norm and archetype from colonial times, was here no merely decorative creature; instead, he was an honored figure whose lofty status was matched by his function and large responsibility, encouraging the kind of deference which gives to excellence its social utility. Louis B. Wright describes persuasively the respect for energy and application exhibited by the original Virginia aristocracy in his *The First Gentlemen of Virginia* (1940). And what he says about the Old Dominion before 1800 will apply just as well in Connecticut, South Carolina, or Massachusetts.

The moral and emotional bases for Jacobin *ressentiment* are not present in such societies—especially when they embody so much in the way of opportunity. Captain Smith told the lazy courtiers at Jamestown that they had a choice of useful labor—or death. In Massachusetts, a Dionysian and promiscuous mixture of Christians, Indians, and bears, the borderland culture of the trading post and the uncivilized fringe, was replaced by the authority of Captain Endicott and the General Court—with the Maypole cut down and (in Hawthorne's story of the event) those capable of reformation brought back to a situation within the bonds of society, where they could join in the adult business of marching "heavenward." Medieval life may have been properly summarized in the image of a dance. But life in early America was better represented by less festive symbols—such as hunting, planting, and harvest, militia muster, and group prayer.

Finally, because the American colonials grew to embody their own version of a civil order, rooted in an adumbrated version of the English past but without regimentation according to some plan for their political development, it is natural that they have left among their descendants a hostility to the idea of teleocratic government: the kind of government defined by large purposes, not by its way of operating. Managed development (as opposed to "benign neglect") is the idea that helped bring on the American Revolution. After 1763 and the conclusion of the Seven Years War, it was a decision of the Grenville Administration that the North American colonies be governed according to a policy, so that they might sustain some of the costs of defending their borders: that they might serve the interests of Great Britain while serving their own. It was from the first recognized as an innovation, a change in management style and in constitutional arrangements. Patriots saw in it not a legitimate exercise of authority but a first step in a design to repeal most of their inherited freedoms—their "way of life" (see Professor Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*)—binding them "in all cases whatsoever."

The most English feature of this established order (until 1776) was its legalism, its devotion to Constitution and common law, and its dependence on lawyers—men of law, who grew to be numerous and important in the colonies as soon as they were well organized and began to make money. Nothing could be more natural than that, once we lost one Constitution and Bill of Rights through revolution (an act based on elaborate constitutional arguments), we established another Constitution and another Bill of Rights—or rather, several of both—as soon as possible. There is no way of understanding the

origins of our fundamental law apart from 18th-century English constitutionalism, than which there is no doctrine more conservative.

Add to all of this wholesome patrimony a religious inheritance and my explanation of the conservative influence of our colonial origins is rounded out. We have been a troublesome and unruly people from the beginning, with little respect for legitimate authority and little appreciation for the keeping of right order or public service. We have exhibited a blind faith in technology or commercial ingenuity and in the value of mere mobility, with an indifference to what is providentially given in the human condition which no Christian can contemplate without uneasiness and regret. Too often Americans have said in their hearts, "*Sicut eritis dei*" ("You shall be as gods"). And as a people we have deceived ourselves in this way from the first, have been too inclined to believe that we can always have what we want. Also, outside of New England, our Fathers were a religious people without much in the way of a clergy or many churches. On the frontier and in the backwater, settlers were prone to forget the Apostles' Creed and, like their descendants, were religious without the necessary minimum of doctrine.

Professors Robert Bellah, Martin Marty, and Cushing Strout, however, are mistaken about the prevalence of a merely civil theology among early Americans and about the importance of Enlightenment apostasy—a favorite myth of the scholars—in the generation which put its special mark on the future destiny of the nation: in our character as an independent people. Irreligion is spawned in comfort, not in the struggle to survive the frontier. What exploded in the Great Awakening had been there among the people long before, an undercurrent of fierce devotion, a hunger for personal grace dispensed in large draughts and for the communion of saints. For in the great empty spaces they had walked the lonesome valley, been there by themselves, and needed to testify as to their good fortune. Christian faith discouraged in the Fathers the modern tendency to seek salvation in politics, protected a private sphere, and discouraged men from divinizing the state. Moreover that faith has minimized among us for 360 years the influence of the besetting virus of modern politics, the power of envy to make amity almost impossible—has done this by making the most of our lack of a "privileged" class.

Perhaps its generically American influence on the composite self of the Republic has been in sustaining our national disposition to be sanguine. I have been slow to recognize that there was anything conservative about belonging to the party of hope. One of the lessons of

the Reagan years is that avoiding the sin of despair with an optimistic conviction that hope and life go together is not the same thing as hard millenarianism and is, furthermore, definitely American—not being so burdened by history that we cannot climb up to the shining city. If we remember what makes despair a sin and an insult to our Creator, we will better understand why American conservatism is often cheerful—and is that way for religious reasons.

Though we conserve its results, the American Revolution was not, strictly speaking, a conservative event. We made war against the common blood and we rationalized our decision outrageously. But we came out of the experience committed to distrust remote, arbitrary, and indifferent authority—authority which imposes its agenda on our local affairs. And we also came out with our assorted civic myths intact—the myth of the New Jerusalem so dear to New England, the myth of the New Eden over the hill, the myth of transplantation, of a new Troy in the West—which the South continued to cherish, despite its complicity in putting much of our colonial history (and England with it) behind us. And finally, the myth of the middle states, of the man who can invent himself, which I connect with Philadelphia and the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. All of these myths helped us to preserve more or less intact the momentum which we drew from the colonial experience, and to carry it westward to fill up the land. The West, *per se*, as opposed to the idea of getting there, had no corporate myth; and therefore, as our literature tells us, the pre-social, state-of-nature men and women found there they brought to an end as swiftly as they could, in their civilizing labors calling to mind the quip of Gouverneur Morris of New York, the son of the patroon, that if men really wished to enjoy full equality, they should "live alone" . . . in the forest, "where natural rights are admitted." Or rather, live there, outside the protections of society, until the wolves arrive.

Our version of self-realization has been (unless we get too abstract about it, which is uncharacteristic) what Richard Weaver calls a "social bond individualism"—a freedom which has as its precondition the survival of an anterior social identity. Whatever we have said of the Declaration of Independence, we begin to think socially by assuming that specific rights are determined by an individual's place in the social reality, are measured by that reality and are inseparable from it. Even in Pennsylvania, a community (in colonial times) proud of its chartered independence of Crown influence, when the Proprietor during the Seven Years War refused to pay his share of taxes to defend the lives of people on the frontier, Pennsylvanians were shocked and

turned away from their devotion to the family of William Penn, calling for a royal governor. All of our social myths presupposed some version of the corporate life—that man is a social being, fulfilled only in the natural associations built upon common experience, upon the ties of blood and friendship, common enterprises, resistance to common enemies, and a common faith. Since, unlike the European nations, our identity is not part of the order of large causes, we are obliged to grow, to develop by stages with the social bond, working upwards, out of local things, communities, neighborhoods, and private associations such as clubs and church congregations; and as the colonial and early national eras provided us with that material, out of history and through law, which in the Constitution we have made into a sovereign.

What I have said thus far explains why I believe that our original American heritage was fundamentally conservative—up through about 1819. Our subsequent departures from that original heritage have been more or less the measure of what is not conservative about American society in our day. Yet the example of our cultural beginnings has continued to retain authority among us, even as we have failed to follow after it, resulting in a dialectic of several alternative Americas with which we are quite familiar.

I cannot on this occasion comment upon how that long and dramatic story may be organized by the question put to us today. We might speak here of our disposition to periodic fits of simplistic moralism, of our national passions for bigness, change, and mobility, or about the earlier dispersal and present decline of the family as an institution—none of it evidence of conservatism, but part of the inheritance of young Americans growing up today. There is nothing conservative about the throwaway society, about social restlessness and frenetic land speculation, or about the kind of individualism which loses track of its grounding in the belief that each person has an immortal soul. By giving the subject matter a reading slightly more Southern (and more Protestant) I could spin out an alternative construction of the evidence organized in Russell Kirk's *The Roots of American Order* and Daniel Boorstin's *The Americans: The Colonial Experience*, *The Americans: The National Experience*, and *The Genius of American Politics*—books for which my admiration is a matter of record. It is not a task even for outlining in the compass of a brief address. I reserve it for another time.

But I will speak of one development within the American experience which, at this point in our national history, threatens to

subvert our particular version of the conservative heritage. From my reaction to alterations in the meaning and authority of equality as a term of honor among us, you will easily infer my reaction to many other changes in the American value system which have occurred within my lifetime.

Equality is the right of any people (the "we" speaking in the Declaration) to expect their government to provide them the protection of law—security for person and property and hope of a future: a notion which has been with us from settlement times. Also there is the equality which results when the law is the same for every citizen who comes before it—at least within the limited sphere of its operation—and the kind of equality which results from having no privileged class of people who are to some degree above the law. The latter condition had resulted in the kind of *ex officio* equality of which Charles Pinckney spoke in the Great Convention—an equality coincident upon the general availability of free land and the shortage of labor, to say nothing of the institutional arrangements established here by the mother country. This equality is full of opportunity but is not "equal opportunity." The influence on these shores of various European ideologies introduced here since 1789, coupled with the development among us of a distinctive (and alienated) intellectual class, a class which owes its exalted status to being protectors of its vision of equality, has brought us away from being a nation of citizens *de facto*, coincidentally, "almost" equals before the law, toward the kind of systematic equality of condition which is the necessary precondition of equality of opportunity. (On this process, see my old friend, the late John East, Senator from North Carolina.) Even among conservatives this axiomatic passion for equality and equal rights, based on a misunderstanding of our heritage from the Declaration of Independence and from the Christian promise that grace is available to all, threatens to swallow up our reverence for law, responsible character, moral principle, and inherited prescription.

All of us know that it is "disreputable" and explosive, even in a Washington governed by Ronald Reagan, to complain of egalitarianism, except for the strictly economic variety, which we manage to resist. However, if we continue to commit ourselves to this confusion, not one component of that rich patrimony of which I have spoken can survive. For equality of condition *qua* equality of opportunity will fill in all the valleys and pull down the hills—create a power which in the name of all good purposes will be enabled in all cases whatsoever to do with us as it will. Those who wish to follow that

broad road to Zion (or perdition) may do so. There is a safety and an accommodation with the powers in such choices. You will not be called "insensitive" or "racist" or "cruel." Your position will be respectable (as the enemy defines respectability), but not conservative, as any of our Fathers would have understood the word. For we can only do as the Left does if we begin all of our deliberations concerning practice and policy with its fundamental premise in the place of our own.

IV.

THE MODERN SPIRIT AND ITS ADVERSARIES

"The Last Great Englishman"*

I

For the purposes of intellectual history it may reasonably be argued that there have been four crucial moments or watersheds in the formation of the Western world as we know it now. In other words, each of these four were "ideological" explosions which made a genuine difference in the configuration of things—a seemingly irreversible difference. And on these surges toward modernity have turned the fortunes of the race, European and otherwise. But the English Revolution of the 1640's, the French Revolution, the American War Between the States, and the Russian Rebellion of 1918 are not best explained as unfoldings from the *Zeitgeist*, pages in an impersonal schematic survey drawn up in the manner of Vico, Marx, or Hegel. For men, as embodiments of personal will, stood at the center of these movements, shaped their course and finally determined their consequence: men whose lives, in stark human terms, resonate with and summarize the meaning of their day. As protagonists or antagonists, they make their particular moment concrete. And assuredly Arthur Wellesley, the "Iron Duke" of Wellington, is one of this special company.

Of course, it is impossible to separate the life of Wellington from that of his great adversary or from the sequence of events which brought that enterprising Corsican to power. For Wellington in the first half of his career successfully opposed Napoleonic France in arms; and in the second or political phase of his life (after 1815), he set himself against the inheritance of Bonapartism and the spirit of revolution which in France had inevitably assumed that final form. The measure of his success in both connections is profoundly significant for those who see history as the inexorable progression of imper-

sonal forces over and through the singularities of space and time. In other words, the Duke is proof to the proposition that men or nations of men can make their own fate—proof that it is possible to "turn the clock back" or to "reverse a trend." Despite a clear evidence of probabilities to the contrary, Wellington triumphed, Bonaparte was overcome. Jacobinism and its consequences in statism and the worship of speed or mass was not incorporated into the sociopolitical experience of the English-speaking peoples. That terrible abstraction, *la volonté générale*, was broken upon the ridge above La Haye Sainte and driven back, to the wild tune of Wellington's pipers, into the salons of the cognoscenti. Certainly there is encouragement for the reluctant determinists of our own era in the events of this one man's life—needed evidence, I believe. And therefore the books here under review seem, in a way that many of their readers may not notice, especially timely. But to explain I must return to Bonaparte and follow the Great Duke's own maxim: "Occupy high ground and then invite a stand-up fight" (*Pillar of State*, 158).

II

Sir Arthur Bryant has long been acclaimed as one of the finest contemporary English historians. Though capable of the closest, most specialized work, especially in military analysis, he belongs to the great tradition of Clarendon, Goldsmith, Hume, Robertson, Froude, Macaulay, and Trevelyan. Yet unlike many of his predecessors in popular history, Sir Arthur is free of the pernicious Whig or futurist bias identified by Herbert Butterfield as the besetting sin of the discipline. The British past is to him an inheritance, not a burden. And it is this general gift, this proprietary feeling for the national character and for the prescription of the national testimony, which makes of his work on Wellington the General a useful counterpoint to the more inclusive biography here bracketed with it. For Bryant makes explicit the way in which the Great Duke's military adventures in Holland, India, Portugal, Spain, and France were finally an extension of his political philosophy; how Arthur Wellesley was listening to archaic "ancestral voices" when he understood himself to be "retained for life" by Crown and Constitution; and therefore how he was preparing throughout his pre-Waterloo years to form an army that was an incarnation of the English temper, to strike with that army a death blow against the armed doctrine which imperiled that temper,

and thus, by seizing the center of the European stage, to shape the course of the next one hundred years.

Wellington, of course, had his great forerunners in this role. Brought to my mind are William the Marshal, Earl of Pembroke under John and Henry II; Lord Talbot and his son (in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, Part I); and Sir Edmund Verney at Edgehill. Each of these great captains personified the "spirit of proud subordination which makes an army [or a nation, in the old sense] and which has nothing to do wth servility" (*Bryant*, p. 299). Each made of the force they led a "family" (*Bryant*, 298, 303, 346, 436), understood the maxim that leadership "requires one who has authority in his face as well as at his back" and that the relation of leader to led depends upon the former's "ability to generate confidence" out of his own person (*Bryant*, 79, 108). And each affirmed the very English equality of manhood which comes with honorable service in the line, the rule that he who is with the king on St. Crispin's Day shall be by him called "brother" (*Henry V*, IV, iii, 50–67). But Wellington comes very late to be grouped with these exemplars of an older England—an England bound by blood, not interest. And the marvel is that this fact did not hinder or intimidate him in the least. As a "cadet of the ruling Protestant ascendancy of Ireland his vision of the world was that of an aristocrat struggling to preserve order, peace, and civilization in an untidy welter of violence, confusion and unreason" (*Bryant*, 184). Furthermore, he was never of any opinion but that Napoleonic France was unreason incarnate and its master a rank Promethean bent upon driving all Europe into "the bottomless abyss of one arbitrary will" (*Bryant*, 233, 279). Indeed, because he was an antique Englishman, because Napoleon and imperialism hidden under rhetoric offended his inmost self, Wellington was able to recognize his campaigns as "war to the knife" and therefore, with grace and quietude, to communicate his own inflexible view of their desperate significance to the men who marched beneath his banner. And finally, after Waterloo, he was, with the authority of that triumph behind him, successful in persuading a great many of his other countrymen to adopt a similar opinion, to believe that something had—at least for a generation—been determined outside of Brussels.

Sir Arthur Bryant's narrative is superbly rendered, full of telling scenes and swept along by a vigorous flow of comment and quotation. The book is what we have learned to expect from him, quick with the current of the times and the tempo of their unfolding. Nor are we, as

readers, ever allowed to forget how much these events mattered. "Old Nosy" was a personage to all of his soldiers. "The Duke" became one for all of England, an erect figure in a tall grey hat to whom, for reasons made clear by this biographer, every man uncovered as he passed.

III

The Countess of Longford has written a remarkable biography of another kind. The inclusive counterpart of Bryant's essay on Wellington the soldier, it is likely to serve our age as the definitive study. For it rests upon a deliberate absorption in an absolute mass of evidence. And its second volume, concerning the difficult problem of the Duke as statesman, does more than merely complete the image established in its first. When I began to read the dustjacket of *The Years of the Sword*, I was somewhat uneasy upon learning that the former Lady Pakenham was a Laborite by party persuasion. Her distant familial connection with the "Iron Duke" did not seem a sufficient insurance against revisionist mischief. And her work was being praised by all the wrong people. But these preliminary reservations were driven from my mind as I read through her almost one thousand pages. For Elizabeth Longford is English before she is socialist; and that is her common denominator with the Duke. English, I say, in a sense that implies the priority of cultural identity over all philosophical, social, or political persuasions. Indeed, her work, as does Bryant's, takes us back to that age when party politics and the labeling of men by ideology were exceptional and aberrant developments, still out of place in the healthy social organism that was Albion. I am still surprised that it is possible for an adherent of the Labor Party to shed this feature of her modern identity and recover for us the transpolitical character of Wellington's public life. Yet I am also encouraged by the development; for it signifies that something from that earlier Britain still lives in the grim context of the contemporary United Kingdom.

Both volumes of the Longford opus are held together by a simple theme, the Duke's idea of "the almost mystical union between himself and the state" (*Pillar of State*, 147). In one respect this sounds modern enough. Yet Wellington's notion of the *patria* was really no different from Burke's very traditional formulation: a vital, almost immortal incorporation of the living, dead, and yet unborn. And the Duke gloried not in control of this state or in the intellectual grasp of its nature-in-

becoming, but rather in service to its immediate needs. His will was to defend a given. And such a will has indeed an almost counter-revolutionary, ideological force when informed by a genuine love for what *is* given—especially a constitution, with a monarch as its steward and visible embodiment.

Thus the determination with which Wellington "stuck to his post," the old "costermonger's donkey" (his own self-description) whose involvement in any business of the realm gave to its execution, even in the eyes of his enemies, a special legitimacy (*Pillar of State*, 331). Hence his support in the House of Lords for a number of bills which he personally disapproved, and his conflicts with French and Austrian "ultras" whose general cause he supported. As General and Prime Minister his motto was ever that "things must be made to work," that there should be "no factious opposition" to measures certain to carry—certainly no opposition that might threaten consequences worse than those of the measure itself. We think immediately of the Reform Bill of 1832 and the collapse of ministries of which Wellington made a part. The continued health of the polity was his primary concern. Anything could be put right again later—that is, if England remained England.

But it is a mistake to forget Wellington the private man, the unpromising boy who learned early that self-imposed rules "make it second nature for men to do the right thing" (*Bryant*, 195). The Countess of Longford never lets us lose sight of the personal ground beneath her subject's career: Wellington's dependence upon friends, especially women; his trouble as head of a difficult family; his small vanities; his gift of phrase; and the gallantry with which he conducted himself in the smallest matters—in affection for old servants, his courtesy to foreign subordinates, in protection of tenants, a fondness for horses and fine dress. Furthermore she keeps before us the man's ability to look reality in the eye, his freedom from all venality or taint of corruption, his modesty in always remembering that "we are sad creatures after all" (*Pillar of State*, 101).

For the Duke was not of one mind throughout his life. Though "he disliked change in his very bones" and, like most of his contemporaries, "had developed a permanent edge on these feelings" in the conflict with France, he was always able to learn, to maneuver his forces so as to preserve their strength, and to remember his own capacity for error. For such reasons he supported revocation of the Corn Laws, carried Catholic Emancipation, and brought on renovation of the universities. And for the same reasons—despite a life-long

hatred for rigid political organizations, a fondness for the customary government by an "association of friends"—he led, and helped to convert into an efficient instrument, a great popular party (*Years of the Sword*, 207; *Pillar of State*, 284). For the alternative was unthinkable: an England with no effective voice for the ancient corporate feeling best denominated by the word "Tory". As the Duke knew, he had no choice in these decisions. For only he, with simple personal authority, could make them stick, could enforce whatever lesson he had learned from harsh necessity. Only he was both a man and an institution. In the days to come Conservative ministers would not often sit in the Lords, would not fight duels, answer their own correspondence, or bristle violently at intrusions upon their privacy (*Pillar of State*, 325). In other words, they would not serve without ambition *and* without false modesty. Nor would they often combine social ease with persons from every station and high feudal dignity. And England would be the less for the difference.

There are of course a few things wrong with the Countess of Longford's Wellington: her inability to understand why the Duke made such a stand on parliamentary reform (or to understand that he was correct in seeing it as a "stage before revolution"); her censure of his acid observations on that durable fraud, "The March of Intellect"; her obliviousness toward the incurably radical character of much Chartist rhetoric (*Pillar of State*, 229, 333). But these are her errors, not her subject's: errors that do nothing to diminish the validity of her portrait. The Duke had an almost infallible foresight into the ultimate designs of his enemies—a foresight which sometimes compelled him to give battle under terrible circumstances, when the issue was great enough to force him out. Hence he could so early recognize in Napoleon the soldier tyrant of Jacobinism whom Burke had predicted during the Terror (*Years of the Sword*, 396). And for the same reason, he could regard only with trepidation a national mood which found its panacea in legislation and legislation alone.

IV

We now inhabit the politicized world whose oncoming Wellington so long forestalled. His reputation among us has suffered in consequence and his present image (despite a fine dramatic representation by Christopher Plummer) is that of a conventional reactionary. The standard authorities on the history of his time give us only a caricature of his merits. Napoleon has had many successors, children of other

revolutions, most of whom have fought their way to power (and against the Christian orders of the West) with words and deceptive ideas, not in the open field. In recent decades only Sir Winston Churchill has given his country anything like the familial unity summed up one hundred years before him in the Duke's standard peroration:

> I am the servant of the Crown and People. I have been paid and rewarded and consider myself retained . . . .

But Churchill we should recall was, like Mrs. Thatcher, a Conservative, not a full Tory. He thrived on politics and was not long a soldier. In addition, he was an intellectual of sorts. Elizabeth Longford's hero therefore deserved a great national mourning even more than his recent rival in these honors. For, as she persuades us, he knew the old Tory secret, belonged to those he served. And his passing, like Churchill's, enabled him to bring them together in spirit one time more. After considering Arthur Wellesley as he is represented in these masterful biographies, we must agree that Tennyson's majestic farewell struck just the proper note:

> Lead out the pageant: sad and slow
> As fits a universal woe,
> Let the long procession go,
> And let the sorrowing crowd about it grow,
> And let the martial music blow;
> The last great Englishman is low.

*Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington: The Years of the Sword* (New York: Harper and Row), 1969; *Wellington: The Pillar of State* (New York: Harper and Row), 1972; Sir Arthur Bryant, *The Great Duke* (New York: William Morrow and Co.), 1972.

A Lion in the North: The Persistence of Sir Walter Scott*

Blazing up against a foreground of storied keeps and blood-remembering streams, the borders of old Scotland came alive in the darkness of August 1971, shining with the ancient symbols of the kingdom's will to be. These watch fires and tall omens of flame on this occasion signified no belated English intrusion. Ordinary politics are now sufficient to these low purposes—that is, when the new Celtic nationalists do not take a hand. Instead, with this vital gesture what was once Europe's most antique polity—the communion of the tribes called by the Romans Caledonia—celebrated the bicentennial of her most famous son. And, as it is now more than ever easy to perceive, in the manner of celebration there was a profound propriety.

I say now because, in the recent past, we have observed an industrious reconsideration of the life and achievement of Sir Walter Scott—an astonishing spate of books and articles more considerable in volume and acuity than the materials available from the same period on Thackeray or George Eliot or even the Brontës: a corpus equalling in its proportions even the contemporary comment on Lawrence and Conrad. Clarke and Cockshut, Cusac, Craig, and Daiches, Davie, Devlin, Gordon, Hart, Jack, Keith, Lauber, Mayhead, Millgate, Muir, Tillyard, and Welsh (to name a good sample) have denied the previous sixty years of almost unanimously negative testimony, a firm consensus that Scott was no proper novelist, and together declared the author of *Waverley* to be deserving of a place in the front rank of his kind. This criticism, flying in the face of the heirs of James, Percy Lubbock, and E. M. Forster, embodies a sophisticated teaching. Indeed, so sharp a turn could not occur without much aesthetic reconsideration of the craft of fiction itself. Edgar Johnson's *Sir Walter Scott:*

The Great Unknown, as a discussion of the author's production, completes this trend. And, necessarily, at the same time, Professor Johnson has come up against Lockhart. In the process he has, for our time, prepared a definitive life of his subject and a model for literary biographers yet to come.

There is no diminution in the stature of Johnson's *Scott* owing to its indebtedness to a Scottish emphasis upon a Scottish past. For the critical gifts of those persons whose names I have just recited speak for themselves. Literature is their business—not simplistic chauvinism. Indeed, many of their number are devout futurists and therefore do not approve of what they describe. Americans of another background or Marxists like Georg Lukács have indirectly supported their findings. Yet in most cases it is precisely their origins which have opened to them problems and considerations finally developed only in Johnson's magisterial overview. Reading Scott, we have discovered, requires some affinity for his native experience, and especially for the fifty years of Scots history which the High Sheriff of Selkirk carried in his bones, along with the related events, earlier and later, which gather on that interval. Scott as "maker" straddled centuries. This was the enterprise to which he, as artist, was born: to render for us the "matter of Scotland". I can so argue concerning those novels treating of Scott's homeland's swift transformation inasmuch as that action is the context of his finest productions—and because he made of that brief period a summary and miniature of over three hundred years in the record of Christendom as a whole. The reader unaware that these narratives have their interest chiefly in their enveloping action finds in the same (in Scott's own terms) only "a clasped book and a sealed fountain". To him remains only the tedium of an uncircumstanced emphasis upon the novelist's protagonists. And in that way lie contempt and confusion.

Exactly as Johnson informs us, Scott—the boy, the man, and the patriarch—was preoccupied with the ancestral things. About that past he was unable to settle his mind. Therefore, for his heroes (a group proverbially weak and overcivilized) Scott created an apology: a private ambiance embodying a portion of himself, equally bound to the imperatives of nature as the ordinary servants of history and prescription are to their more proprietary function. And thus in his best work Sir Walter told (as he lived) two stories. The one we believe as we do a ballad, spare and clean and fatal. It lives especially in his supporting characters—those for whom no *praxis* occurs. The other we can respect, as does Scott himself. But what is important is that we

cannot love it. The novelist prevents us in this through his manipulation of an authorial presence. When, as in *Waverley*, his hero Edward manages to "lay the ghost of honor", he does so for honor's sake. For someone "needs" him. And thus he may avoid the final ventures of the Jacobites with no official discredit, retire and live privately in cozy domesticity. Yet, as D. D. Devlin tells us, Scott also makes us, with a stale romance, dislike the fellow. Edward is surrounded by language and caught in situations which measure his deficiency: language and situations which, as Scott's persona always does, point to the importance of will and judgment—even though these may not suffice. His only chance of personhood lay in service to a fatal cause; and this he avoids in the prudence of inactivity and lukewarm passion.

Of course, in *Waverley* and its successors Scott produced a legion of full-blooded heroic figures. Although often active only on the fringes of the plot and frequently confined to episodes of eccentricity, they endure in memory and command a persistent respect. Scott cared about them as he could not about his equivocating lovers. And it is through their sort, as they surround and define Scott's shapeless moderns and natural Whigs, that this first "prince of novelists" reflected much of the sense of history which made his work seem important to an audience under the shadow of 1789. Yet in developing these characters Scott sometimes discerns in their composition a deep flaw, cleft into their hearts by the dark prospect of their future. Rob Roy MacGregor, the Lovells, Meg Merrilies, Flora MacIvor, Vich Ian Vohl, and the Baron Bradwardine remain recognizably human and touching even in their most explosive moments. However, these admirable throwbacks are so caught up in their own particular crises that they act against the best interest of their cause. Hence the artist's dilemma, ordering his handiwork even when his craft was a species of colorful but inert narrative verse: how to project in fable the temper which will keep as much as is possible of the real Scotland without betraying through an excessive devotion a patrimony doomed to alteration.

The analogy here is Virgil (though I could use almost as well the Shakespeare of the Histories). And the Mantuan is subject to the same reservation that occurs to us after we have faced up to Scott. Sir Maurice Bowra tells us that Turnus is a better hero than the son of Anchises. We cannot dispute him. Yet Virgil's *fatum* is made to seem real—even as Scott's history; and it is also part of a full-scale supernatural machinery (which gives Virgil an advantage over any novelist). Particular men can touch the progress of such authorities, but only within their restricted discretions. Furthermore, it is better

for their credit with the ages and for their personal equanimity if there is a dead and prescient father available to tell them the best that they can do. Scott's paltry trimmers lack such sanction and comfort. They are chosen but rarely choose. A Redgauntlet (in the fine novel to which he gives a name) or an Edgar Ravenswood (*The Bride of Lammermoor*) can tower above the lot in their forfeiture of the world. Others may prefer the death of hopeless battle. But the kingdom cannot be expected to suffer ruin at their dignity's expense. And these protagonists acknowledge as much, as does Scott's almost oral presence in his work. Through them, through his lesser heroes (who could not be expected to discern the operations of the Juggernaut), and through a sympathetic exposé of his gentle young weaklings, a little of Scotland—of *all patriarchy*—was kept.

In this difficult enterprise there was a triumph deserving of the 1971 border burnings. That, and also an explanation of what is wrong with most of the Waverley novels. For Scott gave to the novel as form a grasp of the potential in an enveloping action. The rest, for reasons made clear in Johnson's biography, he could not provide. His work and his life were one. Even as a ballad collector (and he may have been the greatest of that breed), he looked toward a conditional sustaining of a familiar mode of life in an alien time. And the way of Redgauntlet sustained only honor in death.

Johnson alternates the strictly narrative portions of this vast undertaking with chapters of comment spaced more or less according to the dates of his subject's productions. It is a practice followed in his earlier (and almost equally memorable) *Charles Dickens, His Triumph and Tragedy* (1952); and it is a fortunate one. As he observes, Scott's counsels were his own. The public self (and also the "voice" in his fictions) rarely uncovered everything that went on behind a disciplined composure. He was an unknown but Scottish voice as "my landlord" or in other disguises. Scott enjoyed the ruse not only for the "epic objectivity" it gave his presence in the books but also for the sake of his privacy as author. And he was "unknown," even by his numberless acquaintances. In debt, he wrote tirelessly to discharge an obligation made through the folly of others. In youth he silenced private grief and prepared himself to bear arms, despite tremendous physical handicaps, against a French invasion. And he was never a prig—never burdened others with his own sensibilities, his politics, his fears, or his sorrows. His hospitality was proverbial, as was his probity in the highest reaches of the Scots bar. Indeed, there was a quality about the total man which was acknowledged, in person and from his books, by

most of the Western world. Johnson pays tribute to all of that Stoic merit (cxxvii). In criticism and in historic re-creation of the life and times, his achievement is a *heldenleben*. Or else it is the closest thing to that excellence which can now be made of a poet's life. Fifteen years went into these volumes. As a result of Johnson's receipt of the first American Heritage Biography Prize for this work, we can hope that it will come to the attention of such as rarely consider literary biography for anything more than an adventure in vicarious perversity. In the process they may learn how great is the burden of the poet belonging to *someone*, *somewhere*, believing in reason and in blood. For the faithful admirers of that muse, Scott's shortcomings as a novelist are as genuine as they are illuminating. Despite these reservations to his enthusiasm, Johnson has converted his study of the Laird of Abbotsford into a work of moral force—a force greater than what we find in Lockhart: and thus is censure swallowed up. Unquestionably, he has written well. Moreover, he has earned the right to his peroration:

> He changed men's very awareness of history. He made them see the live creature whose heart beat beneath the antique gear, forced them to understand that the past was neither quaintly remote nor merely the present in hauberks but the ever recurrent struggle between human freedom and necessity. He enabled thoughtful readers to know that they themselves were living in the stream of history and subject to its forces. He did not preach; he created. He made a conscious selection from life, and allowed that selection to speak for itself. It is the way of the greatest poets. His whole world vibrates with his bravery, his stoic control, his noble love of the noble, his undismayed contemplation of impersonal fortune and the struggle of mankind. Though he might be brought down, even in death he soared undefeated. . . . But his spirit still haunts his native hills, hovers over all Scotland from Peterhead to the Hebrides and from Burra Firth to the Border. Of all the British men of letters of the nineteenth century he is the noblest and the wisest. For those who have eyes to see and hearts to cherish, he is an inspiration and a heritage for all mankind.

*Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown* (New York: Macmillan), 1970, two volumes.

A Virginia Cato: John Taylor of Caroline and the Agrarian Republic

Though the people of these United States have lived under the same constitution and with the same basic organs of government for almost two centuries, it is unlikely that many of the contemporary inheritors of that continuous experience would recognize the original form and function of their country as the federal union which their fathers made. The means by which the model has been altered are, of course, quite clear: circumstantial adaptation, statutory and constitutional amendment or accretion, and (worst of all) ingenious legal "construction." This much is understood by the ordinary citizen every time his life is disrupted by some egregious court decision or bureaucratic directive. During the two hundred years something foreign has been injected into the American political bloodstream: something private, ideological and abstract, deriving its power from authorities outside the historic American context. But how this corruption occurred, and by what particular stages, he cannot say: how it came to be so complete that we live now in almost total contradiction of the political precedent of our Revolution. One justification for reconsidering the career of John Taylor of Caroline, Virginia's strictest republican, is that he foresaw most of the changes that have come to pass, understood their causes, and fought them with all the energy and intellect at his command.

John Taylor was born into a distinguished Virginia family, the son of James and Anne (Pollard) Taylor of Caroline County, and great-grandson of the first of his line to settle in the colony.[1] Three years after his birth (December, 1753), Taylor's father died. And the responsibility for his upbringing devolved upon his uncle, Edmund Pendleton, who himself played a large role in our nation's history.

Taylor was educated in Donald Robertson's academy (where James Madison was at the same time enrolled), at the College of William and Mary, and in Pendleton's law offices. He had inherited a small property, and in 1774 he received a license to practice his uncle's profession. But before he could begin to become well established as a lawyer, events in the larger world drew him away from Virginia's familiar scene and into the Continental Army, where he served in several states, rising to the rank of major before, in a period of false economy, he resigned in disgust with the inefficiency of the national government and returned home for service in the Virginia House of Delegates. Later, in 1781, he was appointed lieutenant-colonel of the state militia and saw his last fighting under the command of Lafayette against Hessian mercenaries who were a part of that fateful invasion which had its *quietus* at Yorktown.

In the years following the Revolution, Taylor emerged rapidly as one of the principal citizens of the Old Dominion. Though he had sold his patrimony in 1776 and had suffered from the depreciation of state and continental paper currency, he received an ample grant of Western lands for his service under arms. He made a fortune at law and became, in his courtroom oratory and pleadings before the bench, the peer of any Virginia attorney—all of this during the "golden age" of the Virginia bar. His fees ran sometimes to $10,000 a year; and almost all of this income he invested in the land of his native county. Furthermore, in 1783 he made a fine marriage to his cousin Lucy Penn, the daughter of the wealthy attorney and planter, John Penn of North Carolina, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. With his own substance and what this union brought, during the following year he became an active planter himself. And until the day of his death (August 21, 1824) he continued one of the most successful farmers in the upper South—achieving his fame as a cultivator in an era of agricultural depression, often upon depleted soils.

Taylor came finally to own several plantations, thousands of undeveloped acres in Western Kentucky, and over one hundred fifty slaves. But his showplace and home was at Hazelwood on the Rappahannock, where he greeted visitors with simplicity and taste, generous hospitality and serious conversation—particularly on the subjects of political philosophy and agricultural reform. A guest thus described him and his estate as they appeared in 1814: "I found an old grey-headed gentleman in an old-fashioned dress, plain in his manners, full of politics and conversational debate. He lives about three miles from . . . Port Royal, Virginia on the finest farm I have ever

seen."[2] A rich man, Taylor the planter soon retired almost completely from his legal practice. Furthermore, even before he had achieved such independence, he was (as early as 1793) by all acknowledgment the spokesman for his county and much of the surrounding territory.[3] And so well was he regarded by other Virginians who had observed him in the courts, in the development of the agricultural societies (in which he played a major role), in the councils of the Episcopal Church (of which he was a faithful communicant), or in the legislature (where he served from 1779–1781, 1783–1785, and 1796–1800) that his neighbors sent him three times (1793–1794, 1803, and 1822–1824) to complete unexpired terms in the United States Senate, and would have sent him for longer stays, had he been willing.

Yet though a man of mark, especially as a political philosopher—a man whose "disinterested principles" were, according to John Randolph of Roanoke, "the only bond of union among Republicans"[4]—Taylor preferred on principle to tend his own cultivated garden and leave the rewards of office and the national arena to men driven by grander ambitions and larger images of themselves.[5] Only when his duty required was he drawn away from his primary vocation as agriculturalist. But on that role, and the politics which made possible the patriarchal planter, his pen was never still, never cut off from the larger world. Indeed, writing from this positive privacy, from the platform and persona which establishment at Hazelwood afforded him, he could speak with more authority than it was possible for a professional politician to achieve. For John Taylor of Caroline, during his maturity, became the classic figure of "old republican" theory: the exemplar of an almost Roman *virtus*, the Virginia Cato, who soldiers, enforces the law, writes in its defense and of the life it secures, and serves the state well when called to office because he has something better to do—because there are lands and people of whose good he is a faithful steward. Like his ancient prototype, he shaped the pattern of his life into an illustration for what he taught. Even in his writing and in the occasional public service.

On the national stage Taylor was remarkably consistent with the posture he assumed within Virginia. And he identified with that point of view throughout his career. All that he attempted follows from what he perceived the Revolution to have been about: from his view of mercantilism and of earlier English history; and from his understanding of republican political theory, in both its modern and its ancient varieties.[6] We had cast off oppressive, centralized control of the colonies by an exploitative British authority. To put in its place a

new authority with the power to threaten either our station or our liberties, an "energetic" government, bound to be controlled by faction, seemed to him ridiculous in the extreme. Hence his horror at the official subdivision of American society into classes or interests, his lifetime devotion to the sovereignty of the states (guaranteed, in his view, by the language of the Declaration), and his uneasiness about the new Constitution of 1787–1788.[7]

Taylor approved of the Union—a union facing outward, toward the "candid world." It was necessary to preserve the liberties of the people in their natural communities by making possible the coexistence of the thirteen separate commonwealths which had, in concert, won free from the hegemony of King George and his feckless Parliament. But his career in national politics began with opposition to ratification of the Philadelphia instrument—effective opposition. His objections in this case foreshadow his subsequent role in the conversation of American politics. The Constitution lacked a bill of rights, particularly a specific statement on the numerous powers not surrendered by the states. The Preamble contained language in contradiction with the procedures for adoption, amendment, and national elections. The states act in these matters, the people through them. The power of direct taxation granted the Federal government also gave Taylor pause. Yet, with the Bill of Rights, Virginia's instrument of ratification (which interpreted what precisely they had agreed upon), and Mr. Jefferson's politically successful insistence upon an "inactive," unconsolidated, non-energetic reading of the original text, Taylor put his trust in the written national bond, strictly construed. And gave to it his continuing, vocal devotion.

The Federal Constitution, in Taylor's conception, was political law—as opposed to local, civil, and other law, which is designed to restrain the citizen in his own community.[8] For the Constitution was basically a law to restrict the conduct of legislators and other public servants—*a law to limit law*—and therefore a means of preventing, within the new nation, a recurrence of those abuses that had brought Americans to revolution in the first place. This emphasis on what the branches and subdivisions of government *could not do* was what Taylor spoke of as "principle" in American politics. It looks to what he perceived as the weakness of the eighteenth-century British system, and of relatively free societies, ancient and modern. In these cultures the liberty of elected or legitimate representatives to reflect the national will to a sovereign had been converted into a susceptibility to factious combination, resentment and schism—into an instrument for

the transfer of power and wealth, with some theoretical and extrinsic imperative definitive of the common good brought in as an excuse for innovation. Artificial aristocracy is the inevitable consequence—consolidation, monopoly, special privilege, jobbery, patronage, and theft by taxation. And in its hands government becomes a "cannibal." Federalism was the American name for politics according to this model. For Taylor, it was a negation of all that he had fought for, from the Revolution on.[9]

There were, of course, many kinds of Federalists: some out of trust for the leaders of the Revolution, some out of fear of anarchy, some from dreams of national glory, and some in hopes of wealth. These plus the occasional Federalists who were simply determined to have a national government capable of defending itself against attack were all (except for perhaps this last group) expressions of one side of the deep division always present in republican political theory. Taylor bespeaks the opposing tradition. In simple terms, the former doctrine associates with city-state republics—cosmopolitan, commercial, secular, and atomistic. Venice is such a republic, and Carthage; also most of the Greek cities of antiquity, at some stage in their development. Early Switzerland and Rome before the *Principate* belong to the opposite stream of influence. They are closed, rural, religious, and corporate societies: places where the achievement of honor by one citizen is, through the social identity, a gift to all.

Though familiar to the generation that won our independence, "small" and "extended" were only counters, convenient terms for the conversion of this dispute into a simple modern idiom. *Convenient but misleading counters.* Yet, by 1787, they were conventional and have since confused our relation to republican theory. A large republic, Publius forgets, may be homogenous, agrarian, unimperial, defended by a citizen army, and xenophobic. A small "free society" may, on the other hand, be polyglot, externally aggressive, impious, served by mercenaries, and united only by a common mendacity: a nest of asocial individualism. But in the corporate society of the agrarian republic, liberty and unity consort well enough.[10] The envious hatreds of party and class can be held to a minimum. And a considerable inequality of status and function can be justified to all because of the anterior identity dependent on these natural roles, binding levels and orders into a tribal whole: a voluntary bond which is supportive of their respective private selves, within which their personal dignity must be achieved, if it is to be achieved at all.

Thus the thought of John Taylor comes of honorable and ancient origins. He speaks for what Michael Oakeshott calls the "civil association"—as opposed to the "enterprise association"—theory of the state: the "mode of association . . . in terms of non-instrumental rules of conduct, called 'the law.' "[11] Unlike the Federalists, he understands law and government as protecting what is, not as creating what is yet to be—as "nomocratic," not "teleocratic."[12] Failure to offer such protection was the fatal error of Bute and Townshend, Lords North and (George) Germaine. America after the Revolution had achieved a government which corrected central failings of the British system: had protected an already *known* security of property and personal liberty in already self-governing communities. By achieving, through a political law to limit government and a strictly federal separation of powers, a stability never experienced in Britain or in the Rome of Cato the Censor (the closest approximation in human history to Taylor's ideal republic), the United States had become something original in the "science of politics."[13] Our "new secular order" (as opposed to new theology) forestalled the instability inherent in the "balance of power" regimes praised in commercial republican theory: in regimes where the guarantees of order are converted by natural declension into the engines of exploitation. But its newness rested finally on an argument from history, on crystallized depositions from what Patrick Henry called "the lamp of experience," and not on private speculation.[14] Even though Taylor criticized John Adams for ignoring what was innovative and an improvement upon European precedent in American politics, no political thinker of importance in the first two generations of our national existence was less *a priori*, less concerned with being abstractly inventive. Taylor had no doubt of what a republic should be. He had seen the answer—in Virginia.

Taylor's struggles in the arena of national politics with the friends of concentrated power, the aristocracy of "paper and patronage," seem on the surface to be extremely various. But the issues dividing him from the champions of unlimited federal sovereignty are always the same. As he writes in *Construction Construed, and Constitutions Vindicated*, "To define the nature of government truly, I would say that a power of distributing property, able to gratify avarice and monopoly, designated a bad one; and that the absence of every such power designated a good one."[15] Alexander Hamilton's financial plan for supporting the new government was the original of all such Federalist mischief. From the moment of their proposal (and especially as senator, in 1793 and '94), Taylor fought the idea of a national bank

and the assumption of state debts by the central government. He found no constitutional sanction for federal charters for private businessess or sponsorship of schemes for internal improvement. For one thing, all such proposals seemed to operate at the expense of the South. Land and labor would have to pay the debts the government made by borrowing from this federally protected enterprise. Taxes would pay for credit—but not taxes on banks. Furthermore, a few eminent Federalists seemed to own most of the banknotes or stock and to enjoy most of the benefits of credit. The entire plan smacked of mercantilist protectionism. Like the "country" or "Old Whigs" in England, Taylor saw it as "conspiracy" against the landed interest. And that interest was basic to his version of a healthy American republic.

Taylor also deplored the Federalist attempt to raise a "new model" army. Militia should be the shield of a free society. A large standing army was a threat to self-government, a patronage system, the basis for an artificial aristocracy (i.e., without roots), and contrary to the best republican precedent.[16] Especially after the friends of President Adams passed, early in 1798, their great "gag rule," the Alien and Sedition Acts. In December of that year, Taylor carried his fight against such usurpations into the Virginia Assembly, where he had secured a seat in order to bring forward and insure the passage of the Virginia version of what we now know as the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions. Jefferson was probably the source of this remonstrance, and a great many of his supporters had a part in the official assertion of the states' reserved powers to resist infringements upon the national compact by the national government, just as they (Madison included) had had a part in planning violent resistance, if violence proved their only answer. But Taylor had been in the field, in his section of Virginia, before Jefferson had formulated either his plans of battle or his language of protest. Taylor won victory for the Jeffersonians in debate. And, upon recognition that disunion and civil war were the only alternative courses open to his friends if the political process collapsed any further, he had, after carrying the Resolution of '98, taken a major role in completing the "interposition of 1800," the election of Thomas Jefferson as president. In Taylor's view, all of this labor was loyalty to the bond of national identity, an attempt to preserve the always fragile balance between the contradictory impulses toward concentration and fragmentation which went into the making of our peculiar system of "one and many."[17] Yet, as he had preferred conflict to subservience in 1776, and rebellion to usurpation in 1798, so he persisted when dark days came again: persisted in warning that the

Union, though preferable, could be preserved only on the terms of its original negotiation;[18] and was liable to corruption so long as the spokesmen for its members or components continued to imagine that they might find, in a fusion of the commerce, general welfare, and "necessary and proper" clauses of the Philadelphia instrument seeds of a "sovereign power," in the old-world sense of that word.[19] The honorable blood spilled in the Revolution required nothing less of its heirs.

But after 1800 there was respite and an interlude of hope. Jefferson's victory had been peacefully accepted by those who, two years before, had seemed to threaten military subversion of the electoral process. Furthermore, the new chief magistrate had sounded precisely the proper note in his inaugural address: the minimum of government, the minimum of expense, peace—and thus an administration made strong by its devotion to the law. How well Taylor thought of Jefferson's first-term performance he specified in his pamphlet, *A Defense of the Measures of the Administration of Thomas Jefferson* (1804).[20] Bad Federalist laws were repealed. Retrenchment was in process. There remained only one major problem when this retrospect was done: the Louisiana Purchase (1803). Taylor was able to defend the prudence of this acquisition, and (in the last three chapters of his pamphlet) to detail its positive republican effects. But not its constitutionality under the treaty-making powers. Furthermore, the treaty with France contained irregular and unconstitutional stipulations about what was to be done with Louisiana after the purchase was complete. Friendship moved Taylor to attempt a legal apology. But only his argument from consequences stands the test. Jefferson knew all of this as well as Taylor, which is why he sought after-the-fact authority, in both laws and amendments to the Constitution, for what he had done.

In most respects the Jefferson years were the quietest times in Taylor's adult life, and the season of his closest work on agriculture. True, he did not care for the embargo against trade with offending European powers, and other measures taken by his friend from Albemarle to avoid our entanglement with the side-effects of the Napoleonic Wars. But he accepted their necessity. While serving briefly in the United States Senate, he argued through to adoption the Twelfth Amendment—on procedures for electing President and Vice-President. He put his mind to other needed changes in the body of political law—especially in regard to the judicial power. Thus he continued to distrust governmental power even though (in questions of

extending the franchise and reapportioning the legislature) he exhibited confidence in his Virginia neighbors, except for a few Federalists and certain Democratic-Republicans who had elements in their thought which linked them to the opposing camp. One of these was James Madison. Taylor and other "old Republicans" did not forget the business he had done, with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, under the mask of Publius. Or his direct role in the drafting and ratification of the Constitution. Yet, rather than split his party, Taylor offered no active opposition to Madison's election in 1808. And once the transition was accomplished, he encouraged better-trusted friends, such as James Monroe, to accept places in the new administration. But on the question of foreign war, though the danger of Federalist recovery made him moderate about his opposition once the conflict had begun, he broke officially with the national leadership.[21] He became a member of the Republican minority, the Tertium Quids.

Taylor's reservations about the effect of war on republican institutions are well supported in history and are a basic component of Old Whig doctrine. War would profit contractors, certain "kept" industries and business firms, those desiring federal or military appointments, and the friends of arbitrary "emergency" power. Government would, once "under the gun," be free to plead "reasons of state." Liberty would become exceptional. Social, economic, and political life would be disrupted: the cities filled, families broken, and inflation promoted. And "real property" (i.e., the landed interest) would be called upon to pay the bill.[22] That the necessities of war could be used to effect an internal transformation of the republic made Taylor happy to learn of the Treaty of Ghent.[23] Indeed, it seemed to him that commercial and territorial wars were inimical to the basic nature and best interests of organic, agrarian republics: counterproductive even though the other sort of republic, commercial and "progressive," appeared to thrive on such conflicts. Civil war waged on principle and wars of self-defense might have a healthy effect on a nomocratic, basically rural republic. But not dreams of Manifest Destiny or designs for the forcible annexation of Canada, real factors in the thinking of the War Hawks of 1812. Empire had been the "big idea," the *telos*, that undid the Romans. And in the American context its representatives were clearly responding to Federalist ideology.[24]

In Taylor's remaining years there were even greater national questions to arrest his attention and stimulate his pen. The old heresies of excessive patronage and the Bank (re-established in 1816)

continued to draw his fire. The analogy between the protective tariff and the English corn laws was too obvious for him to overlook.[25] Proposals for federally sponsored improvements—canals, roads, and port facilities—were also clearly special-interest legislation. But the major threats to the Constitution came from other quarters—from the claims of inclusive review powers by the Supreme Court; and from the debate surrounding the Missouri Compromise. Taylor's rigorous critique of the process by which John Marshall led the other justices to reach for the authority to interpret their own functions contains a sharp warning of what must follow from allowing Congress to predetermine the internal policies to be adopted by soon-to-be-sovereign states.

In the matter of the Supreme Court's appellate jurisdiction, Taylor goes back to Philadelphia and the ratification debates. His point is that the powers seized by Marshall are conventional, and (in most cases) subject to reduction by the Congress at any time. The great cases come under his rigorous scrutiny: *Marbury vs. Madison*, *Martin vs. Hunter's Lessee*, *Cohens vs. Virginia*, *McCulloch vs. Maryland*. In his opinion on the last of these questions, Chief Justice Marshall makes broad use of the aforementioned "necessary and proper" clause of the Constitution; and, by what Taylor calls "the golden rule of construction," he forces a branch of the National Bank on a state reluctant to allow for its presence. Taylor foresees where that argument must tend—to a government (or a court) which will undertake whatever measures that answer the ideological compulsions of its members: its "uncivil," or "purpose association" theory of law. And all in the name of interpretation. How potent the magic of that word may be we have learned to our everlasting regret.

Taylor saw most of it coming—the moralistic tyranny of an activist judiciary. And he drew a scathing analogy between the "broad constructionists" and the three faithless sons in the central fable of Swift's *Tale of a Tub*.[26] In Swift each son inherits a coat made of a portion of his father's mantle. In Taylor the three garments are the federal, the state, and the shared powers granted under the Constitution. In both narratives each heir has, in violation of the provisions of the will, by addition or subtraction, altered the original. And particularly Swift's Lord Peter, who is the counterpart of the Virginian's "Judge Construction" (Marshall). These rascals, says Taylor, are the authorities the Federalists should have cited in their violations of the patrimony: Peter, Martin, and Jack—all tempted astray, all ruined in the end, near mad, and unable to live together under the ancestral

roof. Yet Taylor knew this trend would be hard to check—that even his fellow Southerners, with New England in near rebellion during the War of 1812, had looked to the courts to check such recalcitrance. Furthermore, efforts to impeach arbitrary judges (like Justice Chase) had not gone well. But the Sage of Hazelwood took a long view. Eventually his countrymen would heed his alarm. And some of them have. He is nowhere more instructive to our times than in his warnings that the judicial power must be restrained and that proper knowledge of the nation's early history will provide most of the needed chains.

On the Missouri Compromise and its dreadful augury Taylor is equally persuasive. The planter of Caroline heard the fire bell in the night as clearly as his friend at Monticello. And, like Jefferson, he knew better than to take the sudden discovery of the "moral question" of slavery by certain Yankee politicians as anything more than a political maneuver—an attempt to collapse the Virginia Dynasty by recruiting new Federalists in the West. We should remember that many on the frontier feared the extension of slavery because it brought Negroes with it—and also because it expanded the network of talent and deference later called "the Slave Power." Northern commercial and political leaders chafed at the three-fifths ratio. They chafed at the limits placed on the ambitious of their region by the hegemony of the South. Sectional division was their only hope—a politics of suspicion and fear.[27] And a precedent for disrupting or interfering with the internal affairs of a state: for redefining the compact (and "republican government" with it) without the assent of those with whom it had been drawn. Southerners must be made to feel that their stake in the Union would be, from 1820 on, a diminished one: that the federal territories did not belong to them as to other full citizens of the Republic. Submission or disunion must be their only alternatives. For Taylor, the pattern he had recognized since the drafting of the Constitution was finally complete: "The great pecuniary favor granted by congress to certificate-holders, begat banking; banking begat bounties to manufacturing capitalists; bounties to manufacturing capitalists begat an oppressive pension list; these partialities united to beget the Missouri project; that project begat the idea of using slavery as an instrument for effecting a balance of power; when it is put in operation, it will beget new usurpations of internal power over persons and property, and these will beget a dissolution of the union."[28] How prophetic these words were to become Taylor could not foresee. But he could use the political stature he had achieved to sound his own

alarm, both to his region and to the country at large. In his last two years he returned to the United States, and his pen was busy to the end.

Taylor's influence as a political philosopher on subsequent spokesmen for his region is too obvious to require much comment. And he has always had his admirers among the friends of limited government wherever they lived. His present reputation is diminished in proportion to the steady decline in their purchase upon the course of events in our national political life.[29] But it is as thinker and author, and not as an active statesman, that Taylor's career was most significant. As he knew was likely to be the case. Apart from *Arator* (1813), his most popular book, and a work of more than political implication, Taylor wrote four major studies in American politics. To these he added several pamphlets and numerous contributions to the political press.[30] His early "Definitions of Parties; or the Political Effects of the Paper System Considered" (1794) and "An Enquiry into the Principles and Tendency of Certain Public Measures" (1794), along with the already-mentioned *A Defence of the Measures of the Administration of Thomas Jefferson* (1804), sound many of the themes that would occupy Taylor in his later, more ambitious period: the Bank of the United States, excise taxes and tariffs, political parties as factions, *privilege* and *division*. But for years he labored in preparing his great work, *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* (1814), a reply to John Adams's *A Defence of the Constitution of Government of the United States of America* (1787–1788). For almost twenty years Taylor worked on this counter-pleading against Adams's response to Turgot. And the Massachusetts statesman (for whom Taylor always entertained a genuine respect) was understandably surprised to be thus confronted in his old age with an attack on arguments which he had prepared (as Adams correctly insisted) in praise of various *state constitutions*, before a national government had been formed: an attack which treats his praise of Massachusetts, New York, and Maryland as if they were an accurate indication of his national politics. But Taylor was also correct. For it was *how* Adams defended the organization of certain states, with reference to a theory of balanced powers and a theory of "aristocracy" to be acknowledged officially in the construction of an American order, that linked to certain perennial dangers to the Republic. And with these perils, and the forms they had assumed after a quarter century of union, Taylor drew connections to Adams's theory: connections all the more meaningful in that he recognized Adams as the finest, most distinguished thinker in the Federalist camp.

Writing in competition with the best, to the judgment of the ages, Taylor probably spent too much time in completing the 656 pages of his *Inquiry*. His style, always tending toward the prolix and archaic, here often becomes completely entangled.[31] And there are tedious repetitions. But the order and organization, the logical development and use of authorities in this book mark it as a work of great penetration and careful thought. Reasoning after the fact, from history, Taylor denies that government and society are necessarily one.[32] He was no egalitarian in any of the modern senses of the word. And not too clear about the distinction between natural and conventional rights. Disparities among the ranks and conditions of men he takes to be inevitable. Even the legal rights of citizens, apart from the political, are few. But to institutionalize these distinctions (that are generally social or economic) in the form of government is to violate the genius of the organically "grown," civil-association republic, to frustrate its capacity to unite men through the unfettered operation of the *mores majorum*.[33]

The *Inquiry* is in five parts: first, of Adams and artificial aristocracy; second, of the true role of government; third, of the civil qualities of our government (i.e., changes needed in our political law); fourth, of Federalist economics; and finally, of the good "moral principles" (self-restraints) in the American system. Adams's mistake is in confusing the post-feudal English Whig regime with the American version of the Agrarian republic: the English order which perfected the bad principle of economic distribution through "charters." Taylor did not rest his system on either the weakness or the virtue of men; he knew that any government would be asked by those who lived under it to provide for their various special needs. But he never allows us to forget that the power to give is the power to take; or that the only equality government can insure is (apart from simple liberty) the equality of total subjection. Furthermore, the less government can do, the less tumult it will produce. The details of life under a strictly federal arrangement would be regulated by local law, custom, or social pressure—as in matters of religion.[34] The reason for parties, embodying a "standing interest," should disappear. Only then need we not fear the "beast, from which men flee to monarchy"—the mendacious or ideological schemes within which groups "under the title of patriots, are, like fanaticks under the title of saints, ready to perpetrate any crimes to gratify their interest or prejudice." Otherwise, this "monster" of faction, hidden in noble rhetoric, will, as the ancients warn, return us to the situation against which we rebelled in

the first place, but with one difference: we shall face tyrants by the million, instead of a single despot.[35]

Taylor's other theoretical works belong to the last few, apocalyptic years of his life. For the most part, they develop, under pressure, fresh arguments for positions he has already assumed. *Construction Construed, and Constitutions Vindicated* (1820) is a philippic against the usurpations of the Supreme Court, which he perceives in the rechartering of the Bank of the United States, against a prostitution of law by interest and political theory. *Tyranny Unmasked* (1822) is a careful reply to Henry Clay's revival of Hamilton's plan to encourage trade and manufacture. *New Views of the Constitution of the United States* (1823) has as its immediate objective the adoption of certain pending amendments to the Constitution. Its theme is the original derivation of our political law and the nature of the federal power explained by that history—from 1776 forward to the moment when he writes. Madison and Marshall are Taylor's adversaries. They have distorted the record in the effort to justify a more energetic central authority.

All three books are to be valued chiefly for their insight into federal/state relations and the true nature of our Union. At this time (and for reasons detailed above) Taylor's anxiety about the continuing viability of American politics had grown apace. Therefore, these final essays were produced with dispatch and little of the elaboration which marks his *Inquiry*. They belong more to the English Augustan (and originally Ciceronian) tradition of the public or forensic essay on moral and political affairs and less to philosophy or poetry than do the productions of his unhurried deliberation. But, by reason of their usefulness to readers of *Arator* and the *Inquiry*, and also because of what they tell us about the beginnings of a distinctively Southern version of American politics, they deserve to be reprinted and better known. For in them speaks the senatorial voice, the republican "father" which any educated and well-informed American of that generation would have recognized as expressing the corporate American self—our version of *Romanitas*.

But if it is useful and instructive to compare the political writings of John Taylor of Caroline to certain classical models, to the teaching of ancient historians and social philosophers, it is even more appropriate to connect his most influential composition, the *Arator*, with its specific Greek and Roman prototypes. And particularly with the surviving production of the original of his kind, the *De Agri Cultura* of Cato the Censor, the special hero of the Old Whigs.[36] The early Latin prose pastoral (ca. 220 B.C.) initiates a literary tradition which has its

finest flowering in Virgil's *Georgics*.[37] It is a tradition very much alive in America, as witness the *Hard Scrabble* of Texas's John Graves.[38] Like the treatises of Varro and Columella and *The Works and Days* of Hesiod, the eighth-century B.C. Boeotian poet, things written in this vein mix practical agricultural advice and moral reflection.[39] All connect virtue and the proper order of human life with the disciplines of the farmer and stockman. Agriculture is a reasonable but pious dealing with mystery. It involves a prescriptive wisdom, based on experience; and embodies a practice of good manners towards the gods. Its product is the *vir bonus*, the plain good man. And the interdependence of such solid citizens, all of them capable of honor in each other's eyes, all with a share in the *patria*, is the closest we can some to the providentially provided Garden or "golden age" under the present, unpropitious dispensation: *find within, but not by virtue of, government*.

Taylor is like Cato and the other ancients of this party in treating advice on farming as a species of moral instruction. To tell a man how best to raise hogs or grow wheat or manage his servants—and to tell him that these occupations are those which the gods chose as best suited to test our stewardship—is to contribute to his moral being. Says Cato, "Our ancestors . . . when they would praise a worthy man, their praise took this form: 'good husbandman,' 'good farmer'; one so praised was thought to have received the greatest commendation."[40] And it is also in the spirit of that eldest republican to see in solid freemen—independent freeholders—the most important crop of a sound agriculture.[41] Rome in the Punic Wars was defended by yeoman levies, citizen-soldiers drawn up from the tribes for limited terms of service and returning to them, with dignity, once service was done. Amateurs, and without proper leadership, they avoided faction and overcame Carthage and the mighty Hannibal.[42]

Because *Arator* is about the social order of an agricultural republic, and not just about farming, Taylor includes in it materials on the relation of agriculture to the American economy, on agriculture and politics, and on the enemies of the agrarian republic—the freeloaders who would batten upon the farmer, mechanic, and small tradesman. And, on top of these seemingly extraneous asides, he also includes chapters on militia and its advantages over a hired army in a book that seems to have nothing to do with war. Earlier I described agriculture as a discipline. In hard pastoral of Cato's or Taylor's kind, the regular difficulties of agricultural life are perceived as having very positive effects in the formation of character.[43] A formidable militia is

the acid test of the distribution of such character. Furthermore, republics and other constitutional orders that cannot defend themselves without a standing army are not free societies for long. Roman, British, and other histories spell out that lesson loud and clear. For republics survive through men who are willing to assume responsibility. The care and maintenance of personal property are the day to day tests of the general distribution, throughout a population, of such a wholesome spirit. In the context established by *Arator*, each duty well performed is an act of worship, the practice of those virtues "prescribed . . . as the means for the admission . . . into heaven."[44] And also a delight—an inner gratification so strong that the opinions detailed in the chapter "The Pleasures of Agriculture" are implied in the surrounding practical recommendations on the arts of husbandry.[45]

Slaves are for Taylor among the possessions which in turn possess and measure the moral stature of their owners. Or, more properly, the ultimate test of the ethics of ownership. Like Cato and other ancients in this literary tradition, he includes some practical counsel on slave use and management in his book. And also some theoretical comment. Talking here about society, and not about the sphere of political law, he shows the "patriarchal" side of his mind. By definition, in the moment of its inception, Negro slavery was a bad idea: bad, first of all, because it was slavery; and also bad because it brought into the society of the colonies a people not likely to be accepted as citizens, if and when they were freed. Taylor is one with most American thinkers from Washington and Jefferson to Lincoln in doubting that the free Negro could ever be anything but a problem for American politics: in insisting that, once released from bondage, he would have to go somewhere else. And thus, though standing in good company, he demonstrated how little he thought of the universalist doctrine of natural rights. But, unlike Jefferson, he saw a potentially positive moral consequence that might follow from slaveholding, as from all other stewardship of property. Hence, he denies Jefferson's argument in *Notes on the State of Virginia* that slaveholding is automatically harmful to republican virtue.[46] Jefferson and the other great statesmen of Virginia are, in their careers, proofs to the contrary.[47] The distinction which Taylor makes in all of his comment on slavery is basic to Old Whig political thought. He refuses to treat an argument from definition as if it were an argument from circumstance. Therefore, he maintains that, since Negro slavery is thoroughly established, and since the law of self-preservation binds us

to it, it is feckless to complain that we should not have brought in slaves at an earlier date. Writes Taylor, "Negro slavery is an evil which the United States must look in the face. To whine over it, is cowardly; to aggravate it, criminal; and to forebear to alleviate it, because it cannot be wholly cured, foolish."[48] The confusion between these two lines of reasoning, from definition and from circumstance, still complicates and troubles our handling of the public business. And not only where the Negro is concerned.[49]

The writer who reached toward a large audience in *Arator* is a planter's planter, the president of the Virginia Agriculture Society, lifetime member of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, and corresponding associate of many similar organizations. He has brought the new agronomy from England. He speaks as chief agriculturist and political counselor to the whole agrarian community. And he proposes to teach the members of that connection a little political economy and a little practical politics by preparing certain elements from each field from within the perspective of their rural world—with some assistance from the science and the poetry of their way of life. Such labor was for Taylor a kind of stewardship and cultivation. Scholars who would tell us that his passion for the kind of society that produced him does not inform and almost define his political thought have a hard case to make.[50] Taylor, for reasons rooted in his experience and justified in Old Whig or agrarian republican theory, did not wish for us to develop into an urban commercial society. Like his heirs of the 1930's, the Twelve Southerners who wrote *I'll Take My Stand*, he saw only danger in that prospect.[51] And this open preference for modes and orders which we have, at least for the time, rejected may militate against his purchase upon contemporary attention. Or perhaps it works the other way around. For some aspects of the "enterprise-association" republic have been obviously unfruitful. Class struggle strains the ties that bind. And the dignity of liberty is everywhere ill understood. Under these circumstances, in the desire to recover the original genius of American politics, the teaching of the Revolution, we are perhaps ready to ask how we arrived to our present state. To ask "Old Taylor," by reading him with care. And then to appreciate the merits bespoken in the eulogy of his colleague, Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri: " . . . the ideal of a republican statesman, . . . plain and solid, a wise counsellor, a ready and vigorous debater, acute and comprehensive, ripe in all historical and political knowledge, innately republican—modest, courteous, benevolent, hospitable—a skillful,

practical farmer, giving his time to his farm and his books, when not called by emergency to the public service—and returning to his books and his farm when the emergency was over."[52]

The force of Taylor's moral testimony, drawn from a life lived according to his own firm principles, reaches us across the over one hundred sixty years since his death. And almost everything that he wrote or performed tells us that Benton's praise was well deserved.

NOTES

1. Until recently the only biography was Henry H. Simms's *Life of John Taylor: The Story of a Brilliant Leader in the Early Virginia State Rights School* (Richmond: The William Byrd Press, 1932). Now see also Robert E. Shalhope's *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980).

2. A letter from John to David Campbell, quoted on p. 386 of "John Taylor: Democrat or Aristocrat?" *Journal of Politics*, VI (November 1944), 381–402, by Manning Dauer and Hans Hammond.

3. Simms, p. 58.

4. Quoted in Benjamin F. Wright's "The Philosopher of Jeffersonian Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, XXII (November, 1928), 870.

5. See pp. 201–02 of Loren Baritz's *City on a Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1964). The book contains a full chapter on Taylor's pastoral vision.

6. Simms, p. 211. He stresses the impact of the Revolution on Taylor's politics.

7. See Taylor's *Tyranny Unmasked* (Washington, D.C.: Davis and Force, 1822), p. 8, for remarks on the Declaration as creating states.

8. See Eugene Ten Broeck Mudge, *The Social Philosophy of John Taylor of Caroline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 111–16, for the distinction between civil and political law.

9. See Taylor's *New Views on the Constitution of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Way and Gideon, 1823), on the lesson of 1776.

10. On Taylor's full political theory, and on the special qualities of his republicanism, I am much indebted to Andrew Nelson Lytle's "John Taylor and the Political Economy of Agriculture," *American Review*, III, 432–47 and 630–43; IV, 94–99 (Sept., Oct., Nov., 1934).

11. Michael Oakeshott's "Talking Politics," *National Review*, XXVII, No. 47 (Dec. 5, 1975), 1426.

12. Oakeshott develops this distinction between the *societas* and *universitas* in his *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 199–206. The character of the latter type of society is that it holds together only because of a common project affirmed by its members—not because of some sanction attached to its simple existence.

13. References to Roman history are everywhere in Taylor's works. See, for instance, p. 3 of *Tyranny Unmasked* (Augustus as a vile consolidator) and p. 28 of *Construction Construed, and Constitutions Vindicated* (Richmond: Shepherd and Pollard, 1820), an allusion to Sallust on Jugurtha. But the best illustration of Taylor's use of Roman history is his *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* (1814). I cite the edition of Loren Baritz (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), pp. 17, 25, 31, 61, 66, 122, 137, 140, 152, 158, 169, 171, 200, 208, 234, 247–48, 251, 287, 343, 355, 361, 364, 444, 472, 478, 503, 526, and 531.

14. On this species of political reasoning, see H. Trevor Colbourn's *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1965; see also my essay "A Teaching for Republicans: Roman History and the Nation's First Identity," *Intercollegiate Review*, XI (Winter-Spring, 1976), 67–81.

15. *Construction Construed*, p. 15.

16. On the Federalists' "army plot," see Richard Kohn's *Eagle and Sword: The Beginnings of the Military Establishment in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1975).

17. See Thomas Ritchie on p. ii of "To the Reader" in *Construction Construed*.

18. See pp. 95–127 of Thomas Gordon Lloyd's "The Danger Not Yet Over: The Political Thought and Practice of John Taylor of Caroline" (Claremont Ph.D. dissertation, 1973) for a summary of the evidence that Taylor considered secession a serious possibility.

19. See *Construction Construed*, p. 333. The entire book deals with the myth of sovereignty. For Taylor, only God can be called sovereign.

20. *A Defence of the Measures of the Administration of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, D.C.: Samuel H. Smith, 1804).

21. On this period, see Russell Kirk, *John Randolph of Roanoke: A Study in American Politics* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1964), pp. 111–18.

22. A commonplace of Old Whig theory since the early seventeenth century. Walpole's power rested on his ability to avoid expensive wars.

23. Simms, pp. 131–32.

24. See the analysis of Daniel Webster's reply to Hayne in Richard Weaver's "Two Orators," *Modern Age*, XIV (Summer-Fall, 1970), 226–42.

25. *Construction Construed*, p. 323.

26. *New Views of the Constitution*, pp. 298–316.

27. See Lytle on this portion of Taylor's thought. See also Robert E. Shalhope's "Thomas Jefferson's Republicanism and Antebellum Southern Thought," *Journal of Southern History*, XLII (November, 1976), 529–56. Shalhope attributes to Taylor a change in the position of Jefferson and other Southern Republicans, once Northern politics opened them to Taylor's influence.

28. *Construction Construed*, p. 298.

29. Charles A. Beard, in *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: The Free Press, 1943), p. 323, praises Taylor as one of America's few original political philosophers. M. J. C. Vile's *Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), praises Taylor to the skies; see pp. 166–72.

30. These works need to be gathered in a standard edition.

31. Kirk, p. 65, reminds us that John Randolph once suggested that Taylor's works be "translated" into English.

32. *Inquiry*, "Introduction," p. xxvi.

33. For a discussion of non-ideological societies which parallels that of Oakeshott, see Frederick A. Hayek's *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), Vol. 1, pp. 36–38.

34. Taylor believed that the church as an arm of the state spread atheism, and that true religion should flourish best in separation from the political.

35. *Inquiry*, p. 559.

36. I cite the Loeb edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), edited and translated by William Davis Hooper. For the force of Cato as symbol in the eighteenth century, see James W. Johnson's *The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 95–105.

37. See pp. 178–87 of Frank O. Copley's *Latin Literature: From the Beginnings to the Close of the Second Century, A.D.* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1969); see also pp. 305–08.

38. John Graves, *Hard Scrabble: Observations on a Patch of Land* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974). A summary of the English portion of the tradition appears in W. J. Keith's *The Rural Tradition* (North Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1975).

39. Varro's *Rerum Rusticarum* is printed with Cato in the Loeb edition. Columella's *De Re Rustica*, in an edition and translation by H. B. Ash, is printed in three volumes in the same series (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941). I prefer the *Hesiod* translation by Richard Lattimore (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1973).

40. Cato, p. 3.

41. The same view is reflected in Wordsworth's "Michael" and in some poetry by Robert Frost.

42. See Livy's *History of Rome* and Arnold J. Toynbee's *Hannibal's Legacy* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), 2 volumes. Taylor knew this story.

43. Hard pastoral, as opposed to "escapist" or Arcadian pastoral, as in Theocritus and Virgil's *Eclogues*.

44. *Arator; Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical and Political: In Sixty-Four Numbers*, 6th ed. (Petersburg, VA: J. M. Carter, 1818), p. 189.

45. *Arator*, pp. 188–91.

46. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), ed. by William Peden. For support of Taylor, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975).

47. *Arator*, pp. 52–54.

48. *Arator*, p. 93. His position assumes the homogenous republic.

49. Lewis Simpson, in his *The Dispossessed Garden* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1975), pp. 40–43, on the link between slavery and the pastoral in Taylor. Lytle is useful on slavery in Taylor.

50. See Lloyd, p. 287. His refusal to accept Taylor as an agrarian is surprising. It detracts from what is otherwise a useful study.

51. Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930).

52. Quoted on pp. 219–20 of Jay B. Hubbell's *The South in American Literature, 1607–1900* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1954).

What We Can Know for Certain: Frank Owsley and the Recovery of Southern History*

Mnemosyne, Memory, is rightfully denominated "the mother of the Muses"; for she is logically prior to all their doing. Even revelation must wait upon her testimony—must "hear it out" before the word be known as flesh. Without memory, literature and science lack a referent, theology and philosophy decline into aberration, and rhetoric has no audience it can identify or persuade. Of course, Memory lives primarily outside the confines of written history. Ordinarily her rites are celebrated in the hearts of individuals or particular communities of men linked together as one person by struggle, blood, and fortune. Clio is another goddess, nowadays deprived of her inheritance. J. H. Plumb's recent and disturbing *The Death of the Past* is symptomatic of what happens to that poor lady when she is forced to set up on her own. But despite this orphanage, the living past—*histories* informed by *memories*—continues to speak to us through the writings of a few responsible chroniclers. And for the people called (in this country) Southerners, Frank Lawrence Owsley is one of that special, oracular company. Along with Thomas Perkins Abernethy, David Potter, Francis Butler Simkins, David Donald, and E. Merton Coulter (to name a representative few), Owsley submitted to the experience of his nation as it was available to him in the sensibility and character of his fathers—presences, living and dead, who surrounded him in boyhood. By illustrating the similarity of vatic poet and the

* *The South: Old and New Frontiers. Selected Essays of Frank Lawrence Owsley*, ed. by Harriet Chappell Owsley, with a foreword by Andrew Lytle (Athens: University of Georgia Press), 1969.

traditional historian, he *lived into* the world that produced him: penetrated the shape and feel of an earlier time, examined its dimensions, its active principle, its "taste and feel," and then reproduced them all for his generation and those following. Such men and women as are of the same broad lineage remain infinitely the richer for his labors.

None of this definition of historian as humanist is, however, intended to imply that Frank Owsley was less than a master of the method belonging to modern historical scholarship. Though even in his first writing (*c.* 1925) he eschewed the mindless worship of facts *qua* facts (that heresy which is death to the memory-keeper), Owsley knew very well how to contend with mere "social scientists." How and to what end! Both his choice of subjects for research and his selection of sources for supporting evidence of what he would argue of those subjects prove that the Alabamian recognized his natural enemies for what they were and perceived the advantage of confounding them on their own ground. For the gnostic, the positivist, and the home-brew millennialist, there is no comfort in the papers collected for *The South: Old and New Frontiers*. And that holds for both Owsley's essays in formal history and his essays in opinion.

Of the former, the most important (tactically speaking) are those dealing with the "plain folk." No other research into the Southern past has given more discomfiture to would-be Orwellian Rectifiers, Hamiltonians, *and* covert Marxists than Dr. Owsley's on the presence, character, and influence of the yeomanry on the Old South. Unless this host be hidden from view, the whole "liberal" theory of American history is undone; unless their primary impact on Southern life (at least until after World War I) be cast in doubt, talk of "totalitarian regimes" or "slave power" can have no validity. *Plain Folk of the Old South* is indeed the centerpiece in a scholarly revolution. For without the centralizers' myths, locating villains and driving them out for scapegoats become a difficult business.

Like the ante-bellum census and tax rolls behind his *chef-d'oeuvre*, the raw materials or documentation for Owsley's two other major books are taken from direct reportage, the unselfconscious handiwork of the men making the record. Going into *State Rights and the Confederacy* were the proceedings of the Confederate Congress, various artifacts from the Davis administration archives, and other papers from the files of the seceded state governments. The case of the monumental *King Cotton Diplomacy* is somewhat more complicated; but there

again the contents of the United States diplomatic repositories, British and French government sources, and other "undiluted" instruments undergird the narrative. The difference between Olmsted's abolitionist travelogues or the official Adams family apologiae and such uncalculated detritus from time's march is, in effect, the difference between the perpetuation of "opinion" and the acquisition of knowledge. Said another way, Owsley was wary of "calculated" compositions, yet possessed of an unerring sense for the burden hidden in things unrhetorical. But, most important, he seemed to have in his bones the historian's most valuable attribute: an intuition of what his research should produce and therefore a foreknowledge of which innocuous rolls of foolscap or worn ledgers might repay close scrutiny, of where the South *lived* and where its conduct might be explained.

Owsley's social and political papers recall the Agrarian venture of the 'Thirties. The University of Georgia Press is to be congratulated for this and other contributions to the reprinting of the Nashville-based fellowship. That job is almost done—both for overtly Agrarian items and for the more restrictively "professional" productions of the same hands. On reading through the bulk of this work, the honest reporter must first of all be impressed with the variety of positions that may be called Agrarian and the close relationship of Agrarian scholarly, critical, and creative efforts to their tracts for a time; then such a reader will be forced to acknowledge that all this variety nonetheless served one end. As recent commentary on Agrarianism demonstrates, there is occasion for puzzlement in such conclusions from such evidence. As usual, the difficulty issues from a simplification of Southern history and from a set of preconceptions concerning art, life, and the regional character. Essays such as "Democracy Unlimited," "The Soldier Who Walked with God," "The Foundations of Democracy," "The Fundamental Cause of the Civil War: Egocentric Sectionalism," and "The Pillars of Agrarianism" make Owsley's corpus a suitable point of departure for some overdue clarification.

On first impression there is a contradiction of thrust or emphasis between Dr. Owsley's warm consideration of temporary federal or state measures for the relief of regional and national economic distress (*c.* 1930–1936) and his subsequent warnings against overgovernment (*c.* 1955, in the shadow of the Brown decision). Likewise the Plutarchian celebration of the warchief-patriarch in the essay on Freeman's *Lee* appears to cut across the "democratic" grain of *Plain Folk* and the Agrarian speculations. However, the trouble is not so much with

Owsley as in the rigid and passionate insufficiency of the political idiom to which we are accustomed. From its beginnings the South has spoken with two voices, which voice depending upon the variety and source of the pressure it experienced from without. The English Whig tradition of earned Saxon rights and its preoccupation with individual self-realization through liberty and law provided a language for dealing with George III, Federalist mercantilism, and subsequent "colonialist" incursions. But the South has also made its Tory noises: in defense of "peculiar" institutions—spiritual, moral, social, and economic.

In truth, the region's political inheritance is a compounding of these two English strains: a syncretism or worked-out equipoise of the best elements from both doctrines, a synthesis doubled in the "tidewater and frontier" fusion of its literature. The genuine egalitarian and the strictly feudal personality were always rarities below the invisible line. But in a measured concern with both private dignity and public (to say nothing of Christian) duty toward a Creation in which some always have five talents, some three, and some only one, the Southern "spokesman" might draw upon more of either patrimony than he would, off his guard, ordinarily employ without much qualification. Concerning the form and operation of government in what Publius (in *The Federalist*) described as a large and various Republic, his posture would be libertarian. Even so, in his expectations and preferences for the freeholding communities preexisting (and supposedly protected by) that loose umbrella, he would assume an orderly proportion of status and function—a generally familial pattern and hence a more or less structured one. Nothing in the many-sidedness of Owsley and his friends belies this analysis. Indeed, Owsley (as a polemicist) may be said to document (and as a historian, to support) it better than the rest.

As to certain other Agrarian common denominators, a brief word is sufficient for summary. The total enterprise was, in its conception and intent, peculiarly Southern. Contrary to much after-the-fact explanation, its universal overtones were incidental, the consequence of *its* Southernness as much as the merits of Owsley as a scholarly model are of *his*. The large implications are there, and of great importance today—but there, as Cicero and Burke say of good citizenship in general, because they have a foundation in the things of the blood. For there is no conflict between preserving the language and securing a civil polity, no disparity between the making of individual or composite "lives" (i.e., biographies and histories) and the instruction of the

young in reason and right conduct, no inherent animosity separating poetry and the public life. With all, the measure is the human object, the action reflected or rendered. The Agrarians looked to no other subject: man in his contingency, moving upon the body of a specific world, man with a place. That was enough. The parts of their lives take an order only under the rubric of these priorities. In Frank Owsley's work there is ample evidence of their operative purchase on his mind, his will, and his spirit.

A word or two about specific essays. Despite the fact that it is a representative Owsley sampling, I must at this point confess to a regret that *The South: Old and New Frontiers* is not a larger book. This was the right selection for a volume of reasonable size. Yet I would relish a sample of Owsley's irony ("Mr. Daniels Discovers the South"), another reivew or two (of the important works by Frederick Jackson Turner and Walter Prescott Webb), a further illustration of political analysis ("Scottsboro, the Third Crusade," "A Key to Southern Liberalism," and the already-mentioned "Foundations of Democracy"), plus the Agrarian "afterthought" in *Shenandoah* for July of 1952. But these are personal preferences. The full bibliography concluding this gathering makes it possible for any reader to make his own listing. Almost any list, however, will include "Plain Folk and Their Role in Southern History," "Democracy Unlimited," "Egocentric Sectionalism," the Lee essay, and (probably) "A Southerner's View of Abraham Lincoln." Though I have already said that Owsley was careful of concealed political rhetoric, he was a master of the three ancient modes himself. The last item in this catalogue is a convincing illustration—a praising of Lincoln's moderate (and implicitly penitent) plan for dealing with a defeated South, and therefore an oblique but damning censure of the campaigning, pre-inaugural, and early presidential Emancipator.

I cannot here speak at length of Dr. Owsley's considerable narrative gifts, of the felicity of his prose, of his invaluable American history texts, or his nurture of many younger historians now holding chairs throughout the nation and in turn perpetuating their master's discipline in their own students. Each of these facets of Frank Owsley's performance might warrant a separate paper. All reinforce the character of memory-keeper which I have used to account for his total career. He was a man of strong feeling and decided piety; however, as Andrew Lytle remarks in his foreword to his old friend's book, he never "confused" his many rôles. In recovering and preserving a revealing segment of Southern history, he had little need for

argument *by* exposition. And in bringing all he knew of such history to bear upon what transpired in a later South, he had thus an authority otherwise unlikely. Such application is the right and duty of the memory-keeper: a right rarely earned and a duty almost never observed by the lackeys of "presentism" who today profess Southern history. Mrs. Owsley's selection is therefore a healthy corrective, expanding the outreach of her husband's example. I doubt that the years we (Southern and not) are about to live through will in any wise diminish its force. Whatever they bring will leave its truth untouched.

What Made Lyndon Run: A Political Parable*

Toward the end of his life President Lincoln's last partner in the practice of law, the flamboyant William Herndon, grew to be impatient with after-the-fact, pious distortions of the character of his old friend, reports which denied that the Emancipator came to public life with any of the ordinary human motives which we have learned to look for underneath the smiling mask of the *politicus*. Speaking for the majority of Lincoln's Springfield contemporaries who had known him in his political nonage, Herndon said of Father Abraham that his ambition was a little "engine that knew no rest." And what was true of Lincoln was of course also true of lesser men who became Chief Executives: all of them wanted the job beyond what the rest of us can understand and went to some lengths to arrange for their own nomination and/or election. Yet it is even more apposite to apply Herndon's words to Lyndon Baines Johnson than it is to invoke them in connection with the tall man from Illinois or his conventionally ambitious counterparts. For the ambitions of Lincoln, though "towering" and "tireless," were nothing beside those of the thirty-sixth President of the United States. Of this much the first volume of Robert Caro's biography persuades us entirely.

For a Texan more than forty years old who wants to understand his world and how it got that way—a Texan of any political experience—there is no getting around Lyndon Johnson. For his career is the central "given," the fulcrum of the state's political history since the Great Depression. On us, Texans of my generation and the one before it, Johnson has, as nowhere else, made his mark. Through my first four decades LBJ was a point of reference, a figure always "out there," looming on the horizons of my consciousness, filling up the

pages of the hometown newspaper, the air time of local radio and television stations. His was the dominant presence in any discussion of what Texans meant by "serious politicking"—the art and science of acquiring and preserving power *qua* dominion over the fate of others, considered an end in itself. Because until 1960 we saw him (and were encouraged to perceive him thus) as a Southerner and a conservative who moderated his persona only to be "effective," we even offered him a certain admiration. For, though at least marginally one of us, he had learned how to "outfox the Yankees" and to gather to himself an influence over national policy enjoyed by very few of our kind in the previous one hundred years. Furthermore he pounded on our traditional adversaries with a mixture of style and cunning in which we participated vicariously, even when we refused to take his political advice. In other words, he told us what we wanted to hear: which, according to his early associates as interviewed by Caro, is what Johnson did throughout his political career. I can remember caring very much about whether LBJ could defeat John F. Kennedy in the 1960 Democratic Convention, even though most of my family had supported General Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956, expected Kennedy to win the nomination, and to vote against the Democrats in the coming fall. Texas Conservative Democrats were confused by Lyndon Johnson for almost twenty years, and some for an even longer time. But we were not indifferent to him, either before or after his transformation in 1960—or his earlier transformation in 1941–1945. That indignity he did not permit.

The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power, though flawed here and there by the intrusion of conventional Eastern (and liberal) attitudes and by an occasional lack of feeling for the evidence it examines, is rich in the details of Texas life. It is informed by a pattern of quotation and a network of scenes and images recalled in interviews which strike a responsive chord and tell me, out of the materials of memory, that my state was indeed at one time the kind of place he describes, peopled by men and women whose voices I can still hear when I close my eyes. That remembered Texas, which I like very much better than the one I now inhabit, was paradoxically the springboard which propelled and the context which nurtured the political rise of Lyndon Johnson. Caro is perceptive and persuasive on the subject of Johnson's origins, his boyhood and college years. In fact, he may explain even more about the personality of his "hero" than he himself understands. For Texans, everything that we learn about the beginnings of Johnson's life, the attitudes and emotions

which structured his youth, cries out in warning against reposing any public confidence in what he is likely to become. The pattern is unmistakable—"the prince in mufti," urged by friends and family to think better of himself than his capacities, virtues, nature or performance should warrant. Caro gives us antipodal information concerning a variety of other Texans—Alvin Wirtz, Charles Marsh, "Cactus Jack" Garner, W. Lee O'Daniel, George and Herman Brown, Sam Ealy Johnson (Lyndon's father), Speaker Sam Rayburn (his foster father) and, of course, Lady Bird. He adds to these sketches brief impressions of ordinary persons who were neighbors to the Johnsons: persons who attended school with Lyndon, carried him home from a thrashing, loaned him money, worked with him on the roads, cooperated with him in campus political struggles or listened to his fabrications and dreams. The person these Texans remember "couldn't stand not being somebody, just could not stand it." Though "unencumbered by philosophy or ideology" he had "a need to dominate," and a willingness to do whatever was necessary in order to satisfy that need. Caro tells us that there is no surprise in the fact that LBJ became President of the United States: or that, "after a long evolution," it was during his administration that "the balance tipped decisively" from "a 'constitutional' to an 'imperial' Presidency." With these summary generalizations we must agree. As Sam Rayburn reluctantly concluded, "there was no man as vain or more selfish than Lyndon." In his thirst for eminence, status and distinction confirmed through the exercise of authority, he defined what we mean by a "hustler." Lyndon Baines Johnson used and then betrayed almost every person who had a claim upon his loyalty. In the accomplishment of his great design he was a judgment upon his countrymen, a scourge come up out of Texas, and a perpetual source of embarrassment to many who continue to cherish an inheritance he betrayed.

But if the "hallmark of Johnson's career [was a] lack of any consistent ideology or principle, in fact of any moral foundation whatsoever," his opportunism made of his life an even better measure of the times than what we would get from the experiences of a more committed person; and of his story a more various and dramatic spectacle. That is, if the burden of the piece were not so serious. Caro's discussion of the Texas Hill Country milieu which was Lyndon's place of origin (and which marked the course of his life so indelibly) is fine work, evocative of a rigor and deprivation which explain some of Johnson's attitudes, even if they cannot begin to justify them. For

other Texans suffered from poverty as serious as that which scarred the boyhood of LBJ. Indeed, from 1865 until 1945 a great majority of Southerners knew what it meant to be poor. But they did not turn out like Lyndon Johnson, even if they had fewer advantages than he enjoyed. From very early in his life Johnson spoke of being, someday, President. The twists and turns, gains and reverses in his long journey toward the realization of that dream are a political exemplum, surrounded in Caro's account with dozens of lesser parables, drawn from a history where the game of politics is played with such verve and panache that all other American versions of the struggle over dominion seem, when measured against it, mere scrimmages and casual sport. I will praise Caro's portraits of Sam Ealy Johnson and Sam Rayburn; their images are positive counterpoints to the dreadful shadow of Lyndon Johnson. Lady Bird was right in writing of the Speaker in relation to other Texans who were part of the Washington scene in her time that "he was the best of *us*—the best of the simple American stock." Rayburn never forgot "who he was or where he came from." Though powerful almost beyond measure and well acquainted with men of wealth—the oil men of his own region, who admired him greatly—Mister Sam had no name to offer when the minions of Leviathan asked to learn the identity of his favorite contractor. Lyndon Johnson was never thus caught off his guard. He had a list of names for every post, and knew what each man included there could do to promote him if he arranged their business with the government. What Rayburn knew was simpler—the limits of the political sphere, the value of personal honor, the priority which belongs to friendship, the hard life of the farmer and the painful history of his region: knew the latter so well, his father's story of "the party which sent the carpetbagger and the scalawag to the prostrate South with saber and sword," that as a friend predicted he would "not in his lifetime forget Appomattox." And he didn't. Rayburn believed in the political tradition of his party as refined by the Southerners who led it in the Congress. In contrast, "Lyndon believed in nothing but his ambition."

But if the difference between Johnson and the man whose virtue was the rock on which he built his career was almost absolute, the contrast between Lyndon and his father was so extreme as to be too painful to contemplate. Sam Ealy Johnson served in the Texas legislature from 1905–1915 and then again from 1917–1919—six terms, some of the time under Sam Rayburn's leadership. In office, Sam Johnson made no arrangements with the powerful lobbyists who might have rewarded him (in return for a little cooperation) with the

means to an independence he would never extract from the rocky soil of Blanco County. A progressive and a champion of rural interests, the elder Johnson was generally respected by his confreres in office as a disinterested public servant—a great source of new laws, a protector of the Alamo, a champion of pensions and benefits for veterans of assorted wars and a builder of the first highway to reach westward from Austin to Johnson City. Though a proud man, his joy was in what he might accomplish for others, not in promoting himself. Therefore it is predictable that, in spite of the failure and drunkenness of his middle years, his neighbors, at the time of his death (October 23, 1937), still remembered Sam Ealy Johnson with affectionate regard, at his funeral covering the banks of the Pedernales "as far as the eye could reach," raising in tribute to the fallen patriarch the old hymn of their kind, "Shall We Gather at the River." And it is also no wonder that Lyndon Johnson did not understand why they came or honored his father as they did. For his father's kind of success he could never comprehend. To him Sam Johnson was only an embarrassment—that is, until he got ready to run for Congress and needed the old man's skill, and his followers.

When, after education at Southwest Texas State Teachers College, teaching in South Texas and Houston, service as a congressional secretary and as Texas director of the National Youth Administration, Lyndon Johnson first reached for elective office in 1937 by announcing his candidacy for the congressional seat of the Tenth District of Texas, he had as much reason to aspire to a place of importance inside the complex political tradition of his state as any Texan of his generation. The way was open. At 28 he had enjoyed a variety of adventures in the political sphere. He had friends and contacts in Washington and the beginnings of his own organization at home. Rayburn supported him and he had access to persons of influence in the White House. Moreover, he was connected by blood ties and family experience to the central events of Texas history—an ancestor, John Wheeler Bunton, had signed the Texas Declaration of Independence; a grandfather, a great-uncle and other relatives had opened up the trail northward for the great cattle drives which rescued the economy of their state after the War Between the States. Yet Lyndon, as he began his climb for the brass ring, felt insecure and unworthy. And, in some dark disease of the spirit, he continued to feel that way even after his landslide victory over Barry Goldwater in 1964. Because of this emptiness at the core he scrupled at nothing in being certain of his victories—a sequence interrupted only by the great con-

servative populist "Pappy" O'Daniel, who denied Lyndon a Senate seat in 1941, and John F. Kennedy, who kept him from the Presidency in 1960. Went so far, even though, on his terms, victory and wealth (which politics brought to Johnson in unprecedented proportions) could mean so little.

Of course, like Melville's Ahab, Lyndon "had his humanities." But they are merely incidental to the overall impression generated within us by the details of his life. The difficulty with J. Evetts Haley's classic philippic, *A Texan Looks at Lyndon*, is not in the severity of its indictment of his state's leading politician. Rather it lies in what we now see as the moderation of Mr. Haley's charges. And I say all of this after reading only the initial volume of Caro's comprehensive biography. There is more to come — more and worse. I look forward to having the entire story, rendered with the energy, craft and language which Caro has at his command. For it embodies the political lesson Texans and other Americans need to learn over and over again: that the politician who says he wants to do something for us is the one we wish not to elect. For he will invariably cost more than we can afford, more than we can imagine.

*Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: A Path to Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 1982.

The Strange Career of C. Vann Woodward

Sometimes an image can teach us more about our times than volumes of exposition. This is especially the case when it is a poet who has framed the image, finding a meaningful shape and summary in the raw materials of a familiar world. When, in the spring of 1961, my good friend and mentor, the late Donald Davidson, set out to select a contemporary historian of the South whose revisionist views would serve to scourge for Lent his "too, too Southern flesh," he turned naturally to what was then the latest work of C. Vann Woodward. In an address delivered at Nashville's Belmont College, Mr. Davidson depicted himself as sitting "puritanically upright" in an "uncomfortable chair," enduring the requisite mortification by way of uplift with a copy of *The Burden of Southern History* in hand. Davidson and Woodward in this antithesis measured the outward limits of a spectrum of interpretive possibilities. Toward that range and distance Davidson wished to point in mentioning Vann Woodward. Clearly the Tennessee traditionalist knew what he was doing in selecting a symbolically appropriate adversary as a representative of the "new breed" of Southern scholars. And, because of the essay on Southern letters which Woodward included in his new collection, its modernist misconstruction of the evidence examined, Davidson was also correct in his selection of a book to represent that school of thought.

For as U. B. Phillips had been the figure of reference among Southern historians in the 1920's and 30's and Frank Owsley the most important authority in the same field in the 40's and 50's, Comer Vann Woodward of Arkadelphia and Morrilton, Arkansas, had become, well before Davidson employed him to humorous purposes, the leading spokesman and role-model for a group of Southern

historians who reached the top of their profession after WW II and who had a more difficult, problematic relation to the regional past than had their most eminent predecessors in the discipline. Moreover, these historians were clearly well on the way to changing radically the accepted view of the Southern patrimony, reshaping it to suit the preoccupations of the country at large during the era of the Warren Court, the New Frontier, and the Great Society; to mesh properly with the Second Reconstruction, which was well underway in 1961. C. Vann Woodward's career, after 1947 and the publication of his polished but non-political *The Battle of Leyte Gulf*, was certainly made possible by this atmosphere of unchallenged statism, progressive expectation, and expansive compulsory reform. In his choice of themes and organization of evidence Woodward's mature work epitomizes the polarized spirit of his time.

Yet even more than Mr. Davidson could imagine (and he knew a Southern liberal when he saw one), Woodward was something beyond the rank and file of revisionists: not just a representative of this new group but the best of them—even though the most politically involved in his engagement with assorted causes, by his own ironic description, at least in some sense a "presentist" or "moralist" and "activist partisan." In his books, his high journalism and the training of his graduate students, Woodward has been at the cutting edge of many new developments in the attempt to "tell about the South": in the now-fashionable analysis of dissident eccentrics in the region's history, in the focus on Populism and economic conflict, the black experience, the myth of the "New South," and the value of cross-cultural comparisons. Especially he has led the way in pushing up to the limits of scholarly respectability a kind of history written to improve the world—in the words of his biographer, John Herbert Roper, "a history he can use": stretching the boundaries of legitimate learning combined with and/or subjected to partisan liberal causes. In addition, it is fair to say that no other major historian of his generation has been called upon more significantly for *ad hoc* pronouncements and calculated apologetics by the leadership of the Left in Congress and before the High Court. Vann Woodward, by his own confession, has had always a "weakness for history with a purpose." Yet despite this authorial partisanship, he has remained open to criticism of his own compositions, ironic about the necessity of revising them, and ready to learn a truth even if it went against his fondest hopes and deepest convictions. For his irony at his own expense, his commitment to the

traditional and disinterested values of his discipline, his horror of psychologized reductionism and vulgar propaganda, of the excesses of the New Left, are as great or greater than his passion for political improvement. Moreover, they have grown with the passage of time. All of which goes against the case for his indictment as a mere doctrinaire which I have, thus far, drawn out—implying the propriety of some more inclusive view of this very divided man.

As Professor Davidson himself suggested, Woodward's work is usually interesting, well-written and to the point even when, to the conservative, his conclusions are disagreeable. For as he has demonstrated in his memoir/apologia, *Thinking Back*, his confrontation with any subject is so rich and many-sided, so continuous and progressive, that we can rarely help learning from him, whatever he contends. Woodward is sometimes myopic in his focus and often mistaken in his understanding of the record; but he never condescends to history as a mode of knowledge, never takes his subjects for granted or undervalues their importance. This quality if no other explains why he has been one of the major American historians of his generation, a measure of what his discipline can achieve in a time when recognized authorities speak of the past as dead. Despite all of his internal division between academic priorities and political goals, C. Vann Woodward *has known better than to think it all a game.* And for that reason the pattern of his career, as detailed in Professor Roper's *C. Vann Woodward, Southerner*, has been animated by a strange, almost nonpareil oscillation, from what might have seemed predictable, given the strength of Woodward's personality and the public respect which he has accumulated, to what no one would have expected.

* * *

Comer Vann Woodward was born in Vanndale, Arkansas, November 13, 1908, into a family of teachers, planters, and pious Methodists. He was educated in the small towns of his native state, at Henderson-Brown College, at Emory, Columbia, and the University of North Carolina, where in 1937 he completed work on his Ph.D. Roper's interesting and inclusive biography suggests that Woodward's family and youthful association with many "advanced spirits" in their circle of acquaintance propelled him toward an academic career and a

faith in the power of politics to remake a sometimes recalcitrant world. This process intensified when the Woodwards moved to Georgia, where his father served as dean of a junior college at Oxford while his uncle Comer was the dean of men at Emory. Life inside a liberal and well-educated subculture in Atlanta put Vann Woodward on a course from which only three years of military service has ever diverted him. His earliest teaching was as an instructor in English at Georgia Tech, an occupation interrupted by an M.A. (1932) in political science from Columbia University and by a trip to France, Germany, and the Soviet Union. Involvement in radical politics in Georgia and in the defense of a young black Communist against charges of insurrection, when combined with budgetary difficulties at Georgia Tech, cost Woodward his post. For a time he returned to his father's house. He worked briefly for the W.P.A. and began writing a study of the career of a local Populist hero, Tom Watson—the project which, with a little familial assistance working in the background, sent him in the direction of Chapel Hill and a life's work as an historian. Eventually the study of Watson, which grew out of a larger project on seven Southern radicals, "Seven for Demos," became Woodward's dissertation and, as *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel*, his first book. The search for a liberal burden or prescript within the great sweep of Southern history, the fragments of a liberal patrimony within an overwhelmingly conservative record of stubborn, resolute men and deeds, was to occupy much of Woodward's time and energy throughout the rest of his career. It lies just beneath the surface of his lifetime interest in the Populists. But first came marriage, teaching in Florida, Virginia, and California, a military interruption and a series of relocations before Woodward and his household, in 1947, moved to Baltimore, where he joined the faculty of Johns Hopkins University. Roper suggests that a professional situation outside the South was a necessary precondition to the direction Woodward's career was to follow. He may be correct.

* * *

The year 1951 was a watershed in the development of C. Vann Woodward's reputation. For in that year Woodward brought out what we now see were his two best books, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* and the still

authoritative *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913*. The overtly topical qualities in these two books are minimal. The narrative elements are strong. And though they arrive at conclusions which are still in dispute, each is clearly more of an attempt to explain events, the Compromise of 1877 and the Southern experience after Reconstruction through the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson, than an effort to influence behavior. They are history *first*, and a call for the kind of enlightenment which issues from understanding—which brings the courage to act—only incidentally. Moreover, they are problematic in their attitude to what such action might be. Finally, after more than thirty years, both books have kept their place as parts of the serious scholarly conversation on the subjects which they address. Other constructions of the evidence might not see so much conscious mendacity in the willingness of the Redeemers to accept the fact of the Gilded Age, so much of a covert bargain in the election of Rutherford B. Hayes, so much class conflict in the Populist rebellions. Nor are modern scholars, recognizing the ferocity of the recently defeated and partially reconstructed South's determination not to accept a total equality of the races or a danger of black political domination, so certain that the racial arrangements developed in this era were malicious in their intent and designed only to perpetuate the power and wealth of Southern white leadership and the misery of the freedmen. As Woodward himself has since admitted, prevention of conflict was a seriously intended rationale of Jim Crow, supported by Republicans, Negroes, preachers, aristocrats and lesser folks. Moreover, this was especially true of certain types of segregation, affecting social relations. Whether such arguments should have been used to codify separation of the races according to some rigid schema is, of course, another question, one to which our era has made another answer. But pulling in a more pessimistic direction, it has also come to recognize that the original Reconstruction as an engine for bringing about equal treatment of the races was doomed from the start because the North could not for long demand that the Southern states establish policies the other sections of the country refused to adopt as their own. In other words, with the Hayes election no betrayal of the Negro occurred in that no large promises had been made. That is, except by the Republican radicals. And as Professors Gillette, Brock, and Henry have taught us, even the radicals were equivocal.

I doubt the conspiracy theory which undergirds *Reunion and Reaction*. Yet, even so, Woodward tells most of the story of how

Reconstruction came to an end—leaving out only the growing conservatism of the North, its disenchantment with endless schemes for regimenting an ever troublesome Dixie and its weariness with the expense of organized hypocrisy, with imposed reforms—especially as these so often resulted in the election of utterly disreputable, mendacious Republicans from the South. In *Thinking Back* Woodward mentions two other weaknesses: a failure to consider the important part played by Northern Democrats in legitimizing Hayes's election; and an overemphasis on the Texas and Pacific Railroad. Finally, Woodward depends too much on economics in explaining his American Thermidor, even though a return to self-government was clearly the primary concern of the Southerners who had any stake in the business—that old and powerful Southern motive which had drawn many of the forefathers hither from beyond the Atlantic and then had inspired them to participate in the American Revolution. But the continuity of Southern history is a notion which rarely occurs to C. Vann Woodward. Even when he helps us to make a case for it.

Reunion and Reaction was an offshoot of Vann Woodward's research in preparation of *The Origins of the New South.* Its subject matter is encapsulated in the larger book, volume 9 in the distinguished Louisiana State University *History of the South.* Admirers have spoken of this work as a "virtuoso performance." And their judgment is a reasonable one. All of the elements of history had a hand in creating the New South—and the necessary illusion that there would be no impiety toward a sacred past in accepting the Peace of Henry Grady. The War Between the States—defeat and occupation, malice and exploitation, outrage and poverty—changed the South forever. Yet it was important, even necessary, for Southern leaders during the Redemption to pretend that it had not brought any real change of mind or heart. And in more ways than they knew (or Woodward ever admits), they were correct. The colonial status of the Southern economy, the freeing of the slaves, the loss of the most promising young men in battle, joined with a little exploitive industrial development and a lot of opportunistic scalawaggery, left the region in a grim condition for almost eighty years after Appomattox. Indeed, until 1945 there was no "New South." And before 1918 not much in the way of augury that it might someday appear. The truth is that the United States, which after World War II rebuilt Germany and Japan, by using credit policies and other instruments of colonial repression kept the South down as long as domestic and international circumstances allowed it to do so.

No wonder at Southern devotion to the memory of the "Lost Cause." On the general theme of Southern development by Northern money Vann Woodward writes the gospel truth. Therefore he is also persuasive concerning the unrelenting poverty of the South. We can believe him concerning the familiar occasions of Populist anger. But he sometimes forgets that there has always been a Populism of the Right as well as of the Left—that the message from the forks of the creek to the "Big Mules" in Atlanta, Dallas or Charlotte may be to put things back as they were—for the leaders of Southern society to behave like kinsmen, friends and neighbors, according to their announced values, and not like persons with no investment in the common good of the communities they are expected to lead and govern in fatherly, proprietary responsibility. Populist orators from Nathaniel Bacon to George C. Wallace have made a considerable noise about betrayal from within because their rhetorical targets have often been people who were expected to behave better, to act out proofs of their own commitment to a corporate life protective of every kind and station. Where Vann Woodward sees primarily a debate about equality and class struggle he has misrepresented his subject, anachronizing by applying an outdated, "foreign" overlay to explain a native phenomenon. In consequence he has been sometimes unclear about the difference between Tom Watson and Tom Paine. It is a large one, too big to overlook unless we have been blinded by our own preconceptions. Which, with Professor Vann Woodward, is sometimes the problem.

However, despite such myopia and tunnel vision (in many cases brought on by the influence of Charles A. Beard and a "conspiracy theory" of economic history), we should in fairness to C. Vann Woodward recognize that he shapes the record of the South from 1877 until 1913 from the perspective of so many different kinds of activity—education, art, literature, politics, architecture, religion—that the result is multifaceted, layered, rich in implications and generally persuasive, even though he may omit the one approach which we believe would best serve his purposes and cancel the ill effects of *a priori* political assumptions on his work. Over against Woodward's Whigs hidden underneath Confederate trappings, his mendacious Redeemers, we might offer Sul Ross of Texas or P. G. T. Beauregard of Louisiana. Instead of the favorite effusions of assorted hypocritical Progressives we might recommend to Professor Vann Woodward a close reading of Robert L. Dabney, Basil Gildersleeve, Albert Taylor

Bledsoe and Raphael Semmes. Or a thorough familiarity with Richard M. Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought.* Professor Roper is clearly on the point when he argues that Woodward's *Origins*, despite its temperate and measured tone, its ironic smile at the expense of hypocrisy, is a book flawed by the author's inability to give "serious consideration [to] the possibility that large numbers of intelligent and honorable people actually believed, and believed intensely, in the values . . . encompassed as the Lost Cause." This habit of not taking such people on their own terms, this "empathic shortfall," is, of course, the cause of what is wrong with Woodward's Bancroft Prize-winning book, and with the rest of his work which overdoes the argument against the operation of a powerful reactionary continuity in the Southern experience. Woodward is now, perhaps, less simplistic about Southern piety than he was in the 1950's and 60's—less determined to describe the Old South as a rhetorical invention. However, in being willfully oblivious to the persistence among Southern conservatives of a certain set of attitudes (Roper cites Carl Degler, Jay Mandle and James Charles Cobb for recent explanations of why they survive), Woodward in his choice of tactics followed sound instincts. For the more monolithic *and* serious a mostly solid South, the less precedent there was for a Southern liberalism of the kind he preferred; and because precedent is so important to traditional Southerners, the greater the difficulty in engendering such liberalism where it had no established roots, no "fathers." In a Southern context the fight over the past is (and always has been) primarily a dispute concerning choices for the present and future. It is never mere historicist antiquarianism. As Woodward himself has written, "the present proceeds" always "on some theory about history." At some point, once the story has been properly told and heard, the Southerner as historian asks, "What are we to do?" Even when he appears to be interested only in railroads in Texas or butchers in New Orleans, his glance is "over the hill." That fact Woodward (in this being superior to his critics) never forgets.

* * *

Vann Woodward's most popular work, issued in serial revisions to reach a mass audience through more than 500,000 copies, is *The*

Strange Career of Jim Crow. It is a monograph/essay-in-opinion which grew directly out of his practical involvement in the struggle for social reform, i.e., the integration of the races in the nation's public schools. In 1952-1953 Woodward joined several other liberal scholars in writing a history of Reconstruction in support of the N.A.A.C.P. brief in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. In 1954 he lectured on Southern ways at the University of London and served as James W. Richard Lecturer at the University of Virginia, where he spoke again of race. Woodward's biographer (who sees no harm in the truth about these events) says that the Arkansas historian was never more the partisan than at this point in his career. In such a mood he converted the Richard lectures into *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, suggesting to all but the most careful readers that there had been a time of easy relations between black and white in the South before the adoption after 1890 of the rigid systems of *de jure* segregation. The argument was calculated to discourage Southern resistance of court-mandated desegregation by implying that, contrary to what U. B. Phillips had maintained, such an innovation would not violate any deeply rooted values within the region's social and political identity, its essential traditions or self-definition. In consequence (to borrow from Woodward's own description) he exaggerated his case, implying some connection between old-fashioned *de facto* segregation, modified by paternalism, with "the type of open, color-blind, egalitarianism to which the modern liberal aspires"—implied it so well, even if by accident, that his book became a "sacred" text to a generation enamored of meliorist regimentation. After Woodward's evidence and conclusions had been challenged by more careful study of the subject, scholarship which finds no one "golden" moment in the American past when race did not "make a difference," he acknowledged and absorbed such correction, bringing out new editions of the 1955 original *Strange Career* in 1957, 1966 and 1974, along with the apologies for the book which appear in his *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* and *Thinking Back*. Furthermore, he has reviewed in the periodicals much of the research undercutting his own views concerning the history of Jim Crow, thus indicating how serious a problem for his standing as an historian his most popular book has been.

The Strange Career of Jim Crow has thus become, because of the double identity of its author, a work continuously in progress, a testimony and a tract for the times—all of these elements gathered around a small scholarly core. It is a book which Woodward has explained and

explained—and almost explained away. A product of strong and generous feelings, it is now defended by reference to the motives behind its composition, not in the name of its organizing method or content. Even so, for Woodward it has also meant a place in history as the author of what Martin Luther King, Jr. called "the Bible of the civil rights movement." As Woodward acknowledges in his memoir, it has made his name a byword and his theories a point of departure for most subsequent discussions of race relations in the South after Emancipation—though in the instance of *Strange Career* the aforesaid eminence has been less comfortable than was the case with *Reunion and Reaction* or *Origins of the New South*. Yet these earlier books were biased only by focus, selection of evidence, and the nature of questions asked, which cannot be said of any version of the book on segregation.

The core of dependable narrative which sustains Woodward's original argument against the notion of a primeval, from-the-foundations, *de jure* discrimination by race is of course the clear evidence that, after 1890, separation of whites from blacks *did become part of a much more systematic, legal pattern than it had been under the Redeemers*; and that self-styled Southern Progressives saw to it that such regularity flourished in the place of *ad hoc* local or private customs. Woodward maintained that shifts toward a better organized and codified set of racial distinctions were concessions by the Redeemers, tossed out to pacify lower-class whites while diverting their attention from economic concerns.

To the contrary, Professor Roper notes, more recent research demonstrates that the movement toward statutory Jim Crow was "initiated by the radical, white Republicans" and "supported or requested by their black allies." In other words the beginnings of the social establishment brought to its final fruition before 1900 were, for the South after Emancipation and defeat, imports from the Midwest—and at least in part derivative of a desire for social peace and independence for the freedman: benevolent in responding to his desire for facilities of his own. Furthermore, the schools, like the churches, were segregated from the first: by Congress (in the District of Columbia), by most of the Northern states, by blacks and radicals involved in the Reconstruction. Even the most perfervid friends of black rights—in the ambitious Civil Rights Act of 1875 and certainly in all earlier Reconstruction laws and amendments—declined to reach toward integrated schools. Even Thaddeus Stevens! Even Justice Harlan! Therefore discussions of the varying fortunes of other kinds of

racial separation *by policy*, in steamboats or trolley cars, were not a proper introduction to considerations of more important forms of Jim Crow—and the "fluidity" in relations which Woodward emphasized was not visible in the context where his history lesson should count for something. To leap from his choice of evidence to a theory of how judicial fiat or executive determination might move to enforce the Supreme Court in *Brown* was in no way justified. For, since 1954, not all kinds of integration have been equally successful—as could have been foreseen even then. The line between *social* and *not social* has always made a difference—and still does.

Finally, as Woodward admitted after readng Joel Williamson, John W. Call, and Howard Rabinowitz, racial feeling in the New South was often of more influence than economic interests in shaping policy, even when decisions were being made by gentlemen; and Jim Crow was sometimes a protection from even worse situations (including persistent physical danger) confronting many people on both sides of the color line. Then there is the matter of black separatism in its contemporary version and before, and of various kinds of black bigotry and collective anger. The study of the Negro in American society has become a very complicated matter since C. Vann Woodward first agreed to participate for the plaintiffs in preparing the *Brown* case. Also the burden of the past to be extracted from the history of that question has become more and more elusive with the passage of every new law, the promulgation of every new regulation or court decision ostensibly calculated to resolve the issue. In a healthy society law is not a proper lever for engineering revolutionary changes. That is, it cannot reach after such a possibility unless one adopts Robespierre's view of its potential—a view which leaves us beyond the protections of constitutional morality, in the hands of a politicized justice which might, in due course, as readily threaten the Negro as assist him in realizing his potential as a free man.

In looking back at the notoriety of *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, C. Vann Woodward claims to have been shocked by how his words were sometimes used. Of the "presentists" and "instrumentalists" he, in the end, fights shy and declines "to be classified among them, save as an interloper." Yet he also declares of his role in the business, that "on the whole" he is "quite unrepentant," and refers with such language to much more than success in calling to the nation's attention the injustice of Jim Crow's undeserved impact on the civilized blacks who were not a threat to the well-being and security of civilized whites,

their families and children. If, regardless of our national passion for assuming (without risk or expense) self-satisfying, moralistic postures, the truth of history is important, then we must conclude that his most famous book has done about as much harm as good. Like the old laws requiring Jim Crow arrangements in the private sector, it distorted the heritage which it was presumably designed to protect, leaving in the historiography nothing for us to affirm but its accidental consequences. And Woodward's sense of the "adventure" of having written such a volume.

* * *

Little that Woodward has authored since *Strange Career* has escaped the shadow of his anomalous *chef d'oeuvre*. Yet most of the material contained in *The Burden of Southern History* (1960) and *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (1971) is more impressive to the knowledgeable student of American history than was the first book on race. The glaring exception to this generalization is the essay "Equality: The Deferred Commitment," which was first given as an address at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania in the fall of 1958. In this work Woodward invokes the Declaration of Independence, understood metaphysically, and declares that after 1875, having first made a commitment to someday realize the full meaning of Emancipation, the United States "defaulted on its moral debt," and declared a "moratorium" on it—a delay of "more than eight decades." Here again Woodward, following the "ticking bomb" theory of the Declaration, *used* history to sanction his own values. Within a few years he repudiated the argument he had made about equal rights for the freedman as a Northern war aim. Learning more history—especially of the North—he corrected himself in "Seeds of Failure in Radical Race Policy" and "The Northern Crusade Against Slavery"—both reprinted in *American Counterpoint*. These later essays are fine work. And the same can be said of Woodward on the implacable John Brown of Pottawatomie, his "The Irony of Southern History," his essay on Melville, Adams, and James, and his thoughtful (though mistaken) "The Search for Southern Identity." As I have already indicated, I am less satisfied with Woodward on the writers of the Southern Literary Renaissance: he depends too much

on the aesthetic of alienation to understand the relationship of many Southern writers to what is given in their inherited perspective upon the world. But "The Historical Dimension" is nonetheless a useful connection between the critic of Southern literature and the Southern historian, one that has already produced moments of insight for both disciplines.

In *American Counterpoint*, assembled out of essays written after Woodward's 1961 departure from Johns Hopkins to be Sterling Professor of History at Yale, there is other successful writing, especially in "The Southern Ethic in a Puritan World" (a treatment of Southern distinctiveness) and "Protestant Slavery in a Catholic World" (a discussion of the humane and paternal characteristic of North American slavery, as opposed to the "peculiar institution" in Latin American countries). The only weak essays in this collection treat of an anomalous Southern liberal and of Woodward's own *Strange Career*. Professor Roper, in his *C. Vann Woodward, Southerner*, argues the theory that somewhere in the 1960's his subject "lost the edge of his former commitments" only to recover his sense of purpose and passion for reform after he was once more enlisted by liberals in Congress to write history with a purpose, looking toward a possible impeachment of President Richard Nixon in 1974. Roper admires this Woodward, and also the retired senior historian who in 1981 testified before a committee of the House of Representatives urging a readoption of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. I believe that Roper is correct about Woodward's increased fastidiousness concerning the integrity of his discipline which appears in the 1960's but incorrect about any renewed tendency toward presentism *after* 1974. Woodward learned a lesson from *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* and certain of his other early works which, *qua* historian, he was not about to "unlearn," whatever his political mood. My proof text for this assertion is *Thinking Back*—as artful and gracious a defense of Woodward's career as we could imagine coming from a man who summarily denies that "history need be written for ideological purposes" or that his views of the region's past were ever "suggested for partisan uses."

* * *

What makes us almost believe Woodward's reconstruction of his own career in *Thinking Back* is, as I said before, his gracious absorp-

tion of criticism, joined as it is to self-made corrections of his original opinions on various subjects which are even more temperate and thoughtful than what that criticism suggested as an alternate reading of the evidence in question. In reading *Thinking Back* there is no painful penance, even for Southern conservatives. Of course, we had in between *American Counterpoint* and the professional memoir *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, impressive but in some of the editor's commentary, anachronistic—as Kenneth S. Lynn has suggested. Even so, there is no overt flavoring of tendentious political distortion in these episodes of hypothetical feminism and overserious attention to female grumbling. Moreover, Woodward, since his retirement in 1978, has continued to write excellent academic journalism, to edit (and contribute to) a collection on the comparative approach to American history and to assemble another volume from the papers of the acerbic Mrs. Chesnut of South Carolina—*The Private Mary Chesnut*—her unpublished Civil War diaries, out of which he shaped the more ambitious, imaginative narratives contained in his Pulitzer Prize-winning volume of 1981. There are evidences of new dimensions in Professor Woodward's thought in the work of his later years and refinements of language and presentation which leave far behind the enthusiasms of his *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* and early work on race: touches of qualification, irony and understatement. But what is most unusual about the course taken by Woodward's work since 1960, about his own strange and unbelievable career, is the extent to which it develops out of a reaction to what had not been careful and disengaged in the first two-thirds of his performance, the writings which had made of him an oracle and a famous man—in this perhaps like no other historian of his time.

Concerning Woodward's editorial memory of his partisan past, Roper, in his perceptive biography, writes, "he was unmistakably involved in scholarship which was both leftist and activist." He finds the mature Woodward's "embarrassment" at what he had attempted as a younger man "inappropriate" and seems not to recognize what political preoccupation has cost Vann Woodward in the way of academic reputation. The erstwhile President of the Southern Historical Association, Organization of American Historians, and American Historical Association who, on the other hand, reveals himself in *Thinking Back*, in his eighth decade compares his work as an historian to that of the novelist who renders a world but follows "no

theory about past, present and future": to the artist who deals in the particular and the concrete. Both men are correct about that portion of reality of which they choose to speak. When Woodward denies that ideological considerations had any influence over his choice of profession he is clearly improving on his own personal history. But it is also true that those qualities which he now values in his earlier works would be visible in them even if he had not been a liberal when they were written—qualities of narrative, reportage, characterization, analysis, and exposition present in his writing from the first: would have been there because he *is* a historian. The genuine ideologue is not so careful about modest, qualified conclusions in arguing *ad verecundiam*. No dreadful division in the soul of this historian can be documented from a little ordinary topicality since, *as Woodward has always maintained*, the scholar is inevitably a man or woman of a particular place; living in the present, he or she has "obligations to it as well as to the past." With this doctrine any responsible conservative historian would agree. Beyond place and ordinary topicality Woodward does not usually extend.

However, at another level Roper is quite correct in discovering political implications in C. Vann Woodward's strong commitment to the decorums of his profession. In this attitude there is something more than academic reserve. To say that such rectitude presupposes a certain conservatism is not to imply that Professor Woodward is drifting toward reaction or that he is about to return to the Methodist Church. Rather, it is to insist that the inquiring, skeptical view of the world—the view of the trained scholar in his approach to evidence—will never trust science, dialectics, or "moral suasion" to "fix it": will recognize how easily all the parts of the human order may be forfeited in the attempt to perfect them. Such a mind operates on the assumption that knowledge is more than power—is finally a process for refining, improving the self, based on respect for "authorities" and on what appears as written in the original bill of things. It views the ameliorative process as uncertain and unpredictable, working slowly and with difficulty. To be a scholar on these terms is to be suspicious of simplification. In our time the peril of being an historian of which Vann Woodward speaks so often comes not from uncritical nostalgia for a common past but from too close an identification with the besetting issues of the present world—issues so powerful in their temporary purchase on our attention that they divert the scholar out

of his natural pyrrhonism and incline him to forget the difference between announced intentions and practical consequences. The Woodward who embodies all of these distinctions, who writes in *Thinking Back*, and is explained in *C. Vann Woodward, Southerner* is thus, with a final touch of irony, at least functionally part of the continuity in the intellectual life of the South the existence of which he has so often denied. When he plays that role I am delighted to read his handiwork and to consider the details and the pattern of his biography, though preferably in a season of harvest and fruition, at my ease and sitting in a comfortable chair.

A Writ of Fire and Sword: The Politics of Oliver Cromwell

You ask what I have found, and far and wide I go:
Nothing but Cromwell's house and Cromwell's murderous crew,
The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay,
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen, where are they?
And there is an old beggar wandering in his pride—
His fathers served their fathers before Christ was crucified.
O what of that, O what of that,
What is there left to say?

—W. B. Yeats
"The Curse of Cromwell"

In the political experience of the English-speaking peoples—or more specifically in the revolutionary side of the English political tradition—there is an ingredient which sets them off from the remainder of the West. This quality is a consequence of the conjunction on English soil of emergent nationalism with the full force of the Reformation. It has appeared sporadically in other contexts, especially in Islam, and it has certain obvious antecedents in ancient Israel. But only in Protestant England or in cultures derivative of that Anglo-Saxon matrix was a popular religious and revolutionary movement like that of the Puritans of the 1640's imaginable. Only there could bibliolatry and private judgment have produced a sacred politics and a legion of self-anointed "judges over Zion" to enforce it. And only that England could have formed and given sway to one Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector and judge of judges, whose life is an epitome of the Puritan thing-in-itself.

Cromwell is, of course, among the towering figures in English history. The interest in him generated by Lady Antonia Fraser's recent and masterful biography is part of an unbroken stream.[1] But Cromwell's life and work command our attention for reasons above

and beyond his impress on the events of the seventeenth century; for his deposition has proved to be durable. The peculiar ingredient of English radicalism of which I spoke in beginning has part of its explanation in that durability. Other mighty men and great captains have had almost no significance for political thought (Henry V, Lord Melbourne, Nelson, Marlborough, and Edward I, to mention a representative selection). Most politically influential thinkers have had very little to do with or influence upon the highest reaches of the public life of their time (Hobbes, Locke, and, in the last analysis, even Burke come to mind). Elizabeth I, Alfred, and William the Conqueror are the rulers of England who rank with Cromwell as philosophically significant influences on later history. A little behind stand Henry VII, Disraeli, and Walpole.[2]

Yet by making this assertion and these lists I do not signify that any of these princes or ministers were conscious agents of innovation in political philosophy. All that we need to understand of their careers, if we are to make a claim for their intellectual importance, is that once they were concluded it was no longer possible to consider questions concerning the political good in what had been the customary fashion. Therefore, when I refer to the politics of Oliver Cromwell, I am making an inference from conduct, correspondence, public oratory, and intelligent firsthand witness. But I use also another set of inferences—the unmistakable impact of Cromwell's words and deeds, and of the words and deeds of men who followed his banner, in the subsequent political conduct of England and the English-speaking nations. As I insisted above, I believe that Cromwell is with us still, gathering new Ironsides in every generation. Such is especially the case in these United States, where his vision and his style have had better fruition than at home. I insist that we must penetrate his example if we are finally to know our own condition.

There are, of course, two Cromwells—or, rather, three. The second is the man who, to "settle the nation," would have been king, had the Saints and the army "called" him to that role. The third is a domestic Cromwell, the private man of Antonia Fraser's emphasis. This last I shall pass for the moment. Of the second I will at present mention only the uneasiness of Christopher Hill, his gifted Marxist biographer, at the old Protector's insistence on social and economic hierarchy: "a nobleman, a gentleman, a yeoman: that is the good interest of the kingdom, and a great one."[3] Oliver Protector, after the

subjugation of Ireland and Scotland, was essentially a moderate Tory or "country party" Whig, only incidentally alienated from the House of Stuart: a man devoted to order, not to change.[4] It is doubtful that, when free from provocation or an atmosphere of overheated religiopolitical rhetoric, he was ever anything else. But the point is that the mature Cromwell rarely enjoyed such freedom from dangerous stimulation, especially during the years of his rise to eminence. Thus it is assuredly the first Cromwell, the activist whom Hill admires, the "boisterous and confident leader of the 1640's" whose testimony echoes "down through the ages," that brings me closest to my subject.[5] But even though Cromwell embodies the familiar paradox in completing his assault on tyranny by establishing an absolutism of his own, even though the outward distinction between his reign and that of Charles I was chiefly a matter of church polity, efficiency, and style, it is a mistake to believe that Cromwell the chief magistrate had a different political mainspring from Cromwell the Lieutenant General of Parliament's New Model Army or Cromwell the vociferous member of the Parliament of 1640. In each case it was a sense of destiny, of a private obligation to shepherd into being a godly commonwealth and a sense of God's hand on himself and in his work.[6]

Cromwell's view of the proper form for his commonwealth altered from time to time.[7] From being jealous of Parliament's authority and ready to label any potential regicide a traitor, he went forward to become the person primarily responsible for the execution of his King and the man who cried "Get ye gone" to more legislative assemblies than most monarchs ever see.[8] As I have indicated already, as Lord Protector he had more complete authority than any English ruler since the Conquest. Furthermore, certain types of tolerance and even charity (for Jews, Roman Catholics, and even a few docile Anglicans) flourished at his will: Liberty of conscience had, after all, been a battle cry of his kind. Yet one item in his prescription and discipline was not negotiable at any point in his career: England was to be ruled by the Saints, those special instruments and interpreters of the divine will, and most particularly by their chief of men and Jehovah's favorite Englishman, Oliver.[9] Granted, Cromwell's definition of this worthy company was less restrictive than that of the Fifth Monarchy men, the intractables for "root and branch" extirpation and leaders of the Barebones Parliament.[10] Cromwell included in

his electorate all those who had fought the good fight, served the Good Old Cause. Leaving room for a cup of ale, a few cakes, music, rough frolic with his soldiers, a hunt, and perhaps a dance or two—room for pious but still recognizably English country squires such as himself—meant nothing contrary or latitudinarian.[11] But his England was still an elect body, led in spirit and confirmed by signs, and he was its Joshua.

All of which brings me to an identification of the essentially inward things which *made* Cromwell a rebel and *sustained* him as a usurper. The first is a confidence that history contains a direct and easily ascertainable reflection of God's purposes here below, that prayer, study, and waiting open to select persons a key to these providences, and that the most dramatic of such signs should specify clearly to all men the leanings of their Creator regarding particular earthly disputes. This view resolves itself into an argument for big battalions—if they can sing psalms and construe the darker passages in *Daniel*. Cromwell never doubted that his period of the national history was "a series of transactions not of men but of the providence of God" or that "the Lord hath done such things amongst us as have not been known in the world these thousand years."[12] As he had learned to do in boyhood, so did he until death—pry out from the pattern of events, especially from victories, auguries of a final Puritan triumph and direction concerning how it might be hurried.[13] He wrote to Col. Robert Hammond, "My dear friend, let us look into the providences; surely they mean somewhat. They hang so together, have been so constant, so clear and unclouded." Always after defeating the Scots he implored them to see a sign in their ruin.[14] And he concluded a pre-Naseby report to the Commons with " . . . He does all. I profess His very hand has led me. I preconsulted none of these things."

The word "led" points, *a fortiori*, to the second and more important subjective source of Cromwell's confidence: his faith in his own ability to sound God's will directly, especially in moments of strong passion. Consider his words to Richard Mayor, the father of his son-in-law: "I have not sought these things; truly, I have been called unto them by the Lord."[15] In the same mood, after turning out the Rump, Cromwell reported to the officers of his council that "perceiving the spirit of God so strong upon me, I would not consult flesh and

blood."[16] This is the Cromwell who could write, after putting an Irish town to the sword, that his massacre was a "righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches."[17] When faced with firm opposition, Cromwell often fell into a manic rage. As Lady Fraser admits, he believed such passions to be sent of God.[18] Like the joy of battle, they gave something in him (and likewise in many of his men) release. Never did he look back upon them with remorse, even though the results were violations of law and custom, arbitrary executions or outright massacres.

Thus it is not inappropriate for us to insist that the politics of Oliver Cromwell are finally visible only in these explosions of rage. True enough, they did not occur frequently. Some conscious preparation was necessary for earnest Oliver to work himself up, considerable patience, some weighing of necessities, and much of the highly recommended "seeking of the Lord." It is probable that Cromwell gave way to wrath only when he could in no other way be certain of preserving himself and a Puritan hegemony. But once released, as at Drogheda and Wexford, or at times in Parliament, this passion was irresistible. Predictably, it broke the spirit of his rather ordinary enemies, even while it made certain that his work would not survive, for it ignored the prescription.[19] As Protector, Cromwell bestrode the three kingdoms, with no peril in his path save murder. He had great plans at the time of his death, not just for England but for all Christendom.[20] But there is no forgetting that his rule rested finally on the sword—a weapon in the hands of Old Noll's righteous tenth of the nation, which was, as he foreknew, sufficient to dominate the rest so long as he lived and commanded.[21]

It is therefore no exaggeration to maintain that the half-veiled ferocity which armed the Ironsides, their Dionysian fury with enemies who were, *by definition*, desperately wicked, made of Cromwell's reign a Terror in its way almost as horrifying as those which laid waste to France and Russia. A revolution which appeals to selfish interests or a private sense of injured merit cannot generate the force of a rebellion drawing authority from an angry and jealous God. Hence it was not surprising that Cromwell and his legions felt so little remorse at ruin and rapine, so little charity toward defeated enemies. Theirs was the ultimate "writ of fire and sword," extending during the heyday of the Commonwealth to the ends of the earth. Wherefore should they withhold their hand? Assuredly such an involvement with the God of Israel implies periodic descents into Canaan and the customary

slaughter of the inhabitants.[22] It is, moreover, a key to the distinctive temper of English-speaking radicalism, a force no less dangerous now than in the seventeenth century.

At this point it is proper to ask what peculiar craft, what habitus, informed the Puritan self-assurance just described. It is difficult to explain conduct on the part of great hosts of people—the better part of an entire nation—so different from the normal behavior of ordinary men without assuming that there was some generally accepted *gnosis* in their possession. From the remnants of thought and speech left by Cromwell and his kind it is, however, possible to piece together the rule or discipline which was their "way" toward a holy politics: a way which was guaranteed to open the providences and prepare the heart for directions from on high. A good place to discover the first premise or ground of this practice is, once again, in remarks by Cromwell himself. Early in his public life, during the first sessions of the Long Parliament, he answered to Sir Philip Warwick and Sir Thomas Chichely when asked what course he would follow in their deliberations: "I can tell you, Sirs, what I would not have; tho' I cannot what I would."[23] There are a number of statements to the same effect in Cromwell's papers and in the records of his contemporaries—repeated affirmations that he sought nothing, had cleared his strong mind of every design that might have had its origins in self. It appears that Cromwell long suspected that God had big plans for him—at least after 1642.[24] Something of that assumption (and also a suggestion of secret calculation) shows up in another statement attributed to him: "None rises so high as he who knows not whither he is going."[25] Hence the exaggerated ceremony of waiting, joined to the practice of setting up circumstances which made the results of that waiting strictly predictable. In setting up these restrictive preconditions, the Puritan never called what he was doing by its proper name. In his mind he was only insisting that part of the law of the prophets be carried out. When the waiting was no longer possible and the self-righteous wrath came on with thunder, it was easier for him then to do on impulse what he was well disposed to do all the time, and it was likely he could act with a strong sense of external direction and no prospect of subsequent remorse. In all likelihood the process drew some of its momentum from an atmosphere of prayer and the reiterative sound or sight

of passages from Scripture which depict providential leadings, passages which speak of the Kingdom coming or which hold up for emulation the chieftains and patriarchs of old who had for guidance the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The selective bibliolatry that fed into Puritan politics was both continuous and oppressive; but for men "called by God to rule with Him and for Him," men "as like the forming of God as ever people were" (Israel not excepted), a little abuse of the text or a bit of maneuvering and manipulation toward becoming "the edge of promises and prophecies"—a little pure gnostic forcing—was to be expected.[26]

An excellent illustration of the Puritan technique of searching for certainty may once more be drawn directly from the stages by which Cromwell came to kill Charles I. That Oliver knew early where the business would end is indicated by comments and documents which date from the Putney debates, after Coronet Joyce's seizure of the King; from the flight of Charles to the Isle of Wight; and from the *Remonstrance* of the officers' council in the North, after Preston.[27] In each instance Cromwell rejoiced at fresh evidence of divine intent, remarked darkly on where the providences were tending, and then, after a brief interval, publicly professed himself to have an open mind concerning an accommodation with their captive prince.[28] Yet there is evidence that Cromwell had a hand in all of these developments. One given in the situation after the First Civil War was the impatience of an unpaid and "agitated" (i.e., politically active) army. A second was the uncertain disposition of the incurably royalist Scots. Another was the stubbornness of Charles Stuart, his trimming, his tendency to tack and turn and thus forfeit all of his potential allies among former enemies or neutrals. Finally there was the determination of the unpurged and heavily Presbyterian Long Parliament to control both the army and the king. Predictably the pressure built up as each element in this mix shifted in its relation to the others. Cromwell managed the army, managed the Commons, and treated with the king. He fought down a royalist rebellion, and then he left Colonel Pride to purge the House, remaining aloof with troops in the North. But at this point the ritual was only half completed. Cromwell still claimed to be uncertain about indicting the king.[29] Then, with perfect timing (when certain that most of his supporters agreed), Cromwell turned on the defenseless prisoner, the "man of blood," and announced that he was finally privy to God's will in the matter.[30] On this piece of history the

curious should read both Lady Fraser and Professor C. V. Wedgwood's memorable *A Coffin for King Charles*. It is not difficult to infer from these narratives the operation of a *gnosis* such as is described above.

But the center or essence of Cromwell, the most significant passage in the record of his statements or sentiments, does not come from the days when, with "horrifying exhilaration," he drove associates to share in regicide and sign the warrant for it, for mere exasperation or fear of later punishment could force a strong man into bullying and shouting at his more timid and scrupulous supporters. Rather, it appears that Cromwell comes closest to exposing his ultimate conception of the Puritan enterprise when, before Naseby, he rode the field in a mood of wild joy and "could not . . . but smile out to God in praises, in assurance of victory, because God would, by things that are not, bring to naught things that are."[31] Here is the pure gnostic delight in conflict with being itself, the adept's passion for destroying and making over things given, for "substitute" creations shaped after the warm fancies of a vigorous and image-filled imagination upon the anvil of action performed almost for the very sake of doing.[32] Cromwell is, it must be agreed, characteristically negative in his moment of ultimate self-exposure: more pleased with what God has, through the might of His servant, *undone* than with any dream of what might be ushered in as replacement. For a man who despised "passive and suffering principles," the act was what counted.[33] The aftermath could be left to take care of itself. As Ahab pursued more than a whale, Cromwell struck at more than King Charles. We should not take lightly his motto: *Pax Quaeritur Bello*, "Let peace be sought through war." The words denominate the man.

It finally comes down to language, to the idiom of Cromwellian politics, the manic and exhortive sound which governed the Protector and his era.[34] When confronted by its authority, no Saint could resist, oppose, or think through propositions couched in the "holy tongue." Its power was at the bottom of Cromwell's difficulties as sovereign. With peace within the Commonwealth, the dynamic of millenarian expectation drove Oliver to look beyond the seas for fresh opportunities of application; he told his army council that "God had brought us where we are to consider the work we may do in the world as well as at home."[35] But the permanent revolution had a momentum of its

own and made fair to continue inside England itself. New evils could be discovered everywhere, leftovers of the old and worldly dispensation supposedly removed with Charles's head. There were sufficient portents. New prophets sprang up from every corner of the land. Cromwell was man enough to resist this drift, aided by general fears of surviving royalism and the existence of young Charles II abroad. At Cromwell's death England had, from twenty years of striving, learned to put wax in its ears and hear no more hopeful songs of Jerusalem over the hill. For Oliver Protector there was, as stated earlier, always the old certainty, a faith that his version of the godly Commonwealth had sanction and would be realized.[36] Among many of the Saints there was another thought, but the Ironsides stood between them and their "chief of men." Furthermore, the rest of the nation agreed with the army, in the process confirming its ancient respect for place, function, hierarchy, and the integrity of possessions. As champion and repository of these interests, though for reasons out of keeping with them, even the weary usurper, Lord Oliver, could gather around his aging presence a bit of that magic "that doth hedge a King." On the strength of these old-fashioned, completely ungnostic emotions the Protectorate choked off the very energies that had made it and opened the door to Restoration.

The rest of the politics of Oliver Cromwell are matters of inheritance and historical extrapolation—or at least it so appears when we confine our scrutiny to the details of his public career. But something of another, domestic Cromwell has been promised. It is called for by the great detail of Antonia Fraser's study and by her defense—from necessity and character—of the whole man. In addition, it is also appropriate that these comments conclude with an expansion upon the paradox just remarked, the paradox of Cromwell the traditionalist and vessel of prescription. There is no doubt that Oliver was a good son, husband, and father, a faithful friend, a good neighbor, and a splendid comrade in arms. His sympathy for the fensmen of Ely was genuine, his courtesy to royalist ladies becoming, his mourning for lost companions unfeigned. Certainly he was a model of the hearty Englishman: at least to all of those *within the fold*, those who made the proper noise, spoke the proper idiom, and kept from his way. He would even allow for graceful dispute with those really *on his side*: with those indisputable members of the fellowship of Saints. This doubleness made of the Cromwell who drummed his guests to dinner an anomaly; usually the man on the march was

known only to adversaries.[37] Moreover, even for many enemies, especially of the lesser sort, he had easy forgiveness. His reign was not bloody or noisy or self-indulgent. Clearly he was a patriot, meaning consistently his best for the *patria* and for "God's Englishmen." Yet no evidence could be more misleading or disruptive of our study; for Oliver Cromwell, when full "of the Lord's spirit," put this wholesome identity aside. His right and left hands were without relation. (And the same holds true of other political Puritans, of his generation or later.) Unlike a Jacobin, a Marxist, or a Nazi, his politics were not his own. Hence he could pursue a course which no man so modest in himself would undertake, follow to whatever it required, and bring nothing of the consequent severity home at night.

Cromwell, most observers agree, was without personal vanity; he knew pride only in his confidence of God's favor and direction. As he attributed nothing to himself, that self remained unimplicated, uncorrupted, and free from praise or blame for what it enacted in another's name. As an American long ago exposed to political Puritans, I cannot help thinking of Cromwell by way of analogy to other men "on an errand"; to our version of the species, and especially to the late gnostics who, in God's name, forged a Union of "fire and iron" in our great Civil War. In Lincoln, all of their lineaments are visible—in a manner even more secular, it must be admitted, but making the same sound, hiding practical purposes in the same rhetoric of derivative authority[38]—and also in Lincoln's chief captains, Grant and Sherman.[39] In Stark Young's fine novel *So Red the Rose*, the latter calls upon the parents of a former student and offers human courtesy. Shortly thereafter, in their official capacity Sherman's troopers burn the family out.[40] These Southerners are puzzled at such schizophrenia. They should have studied a life of Cromwell and then emptied the house.

But it is difficult for the inhabitants of a Christian or civilized nation to prepare for the Oliver Cromwells of our world. Until released by their "armed doctrine," they give no warning of what their daemons have in store. They are civil, kind, and literate—even exemplary in their freedom from private vices—until they have searched the record and heard the call. There are, to this day, scholars who point us toward the Puritans as our fountainhead of liberties. They have had some reinforcement from a cinematic distortion of my subject—and by the mild futurism of his more recent biographers. But in Cromwell's time the real friends of English law and justice (which is,

indeed, our patrimony) were the Parliament men who fought the king to save the Crown (and, with it, the charters and the common law) and the royalists who served the king to serve the Crown, at the same time disapproving of Charles's absolutism, his religious policy, and his wild claims of prerogative.[41] Such men, in our time as in Cromwell's, suffer in the atmosphere of fanaticism. They lack the fascination provided by high sentence and conspicuous virtue. If religious, and particularly if Protestant, they find it difficult to outbid their antagonists in claims of holy privilege, more difficult than to confront Hobbes or Marx. But (thanks be to God), thus far in the English-speaking experience, the signs and providences have come out finally on their side.

NOTES

1. Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell: The Lord Protector* (New York: Knopf, 1974). A reading back from this biography into the earlier scholarship devoted to Cromwell was the occasion of this study. Carlyle and Theodore Roosevelt wrote studies, but the standard life is by Sir Charles Firth. W. C. Abbott has edited in four volumes the *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937–1947).

2. Madison, Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt are the obvious American counterparts of Cromwell. Eisenhower is another illustration of the powerful man whose career means little to the history of thought.

3. Christopher Hill, *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1970). The anti-leveling remarks which so frustrate Hill are reproduced in context by Lady Fraser, p. 508, and date from a 1654 address to the first Protectoral Parliament.

4. Fraser, p. 507.

5. Hill, p. 275.

6. How early Cromwell came to the opinion that he was "in on a creation" can be seen in language he used before Naseby. See Fraser, pp. 158–62. See also Austin Woolrych, "Cromwell and the Rule of the Saints," on p. 64 of *The English Civil War and After, 1642–1658*, ed. by R. H. Parry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

7. Lady Fraser observes (p. 397) that Cromwell's prudential plans shifted with his view of Charles I.

8. When frightened by army militancy (1647), Cromwell observed, "If that authority falls to nothing, nothing can follow but confusion" (Fraser, p. 191). The "authority" is the Commons.

9. See Hill, p. 143; see also Fraser, p. 285. Lady Fraser quotes Bishop Burnet's observations concerning the Puritans as a breed: " . . . all that set of men . . . believed there were great occasions in which some men were called to great services, in the doing of which they were excused from the common rules of morality: such were the practices of Ehud and Jael, Samson and David: and by this they fancied they had a privilege from observing the standing rules . . . . It is very obvious how far this principle may be carried, and how all justice and mercy may be laid aside on this pretence by every bold enthusiast."

10. On these most extreme of Puritans, see P. G. Rogers, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

11. On Cromwell's attachment to his soldiers, see Fraser, p. 419. Her biography makes more of Cromwell in mufti than do her predecessors'.

12. These passages are from the opening and closing of the first Protectoral Parliament. See Fraser, p. 508, and Hill, p. 251.

13. The schoolmaster of Cromwell's boyhood was Dr. Thomas Beard, author of *Theatre of God's Judgements* (1597) and other works which maintain that history is a moral drama full of evidences of God's intervention in the affairs of men and of signs or providences of His favor (Fraser, pp. 17–20).

14. Fraser, pp. 256, 361.

15. Ibid., p. 364.

16. Ibid., p. 421. When in the Putney debates the spirit led other men to deny the validity of his "writ from on high," Cromwell sometimes fell back on the authority of reason, insisted that God made no contradictions, and warned his opponents against "false conceits," "carnal imagination," and "carnal reasoning"—A. S. P. Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates, 1647–1649* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 8, 15.

17. Fraser, pp. 338, 340. Actually Cromwell made the same remark after both Drogheda and Wexford.

18. Ibid., pp. 701–02.

19. My point is that the method employed by Cromwell in gaining power went against the English national character—indeed, against human nature itself. The trappings of legitimacy were completely neglected by the Puritans.

20. Cromwell hoped for a Protestant alliance to transform all of Europe. His designs for converting two-thirds of Ireland into a Puritan plantation and for destroying the social system of Scotland show how close to the ruthlessness of the Fifth Monarchy men he came. See Fraser, pp. 497–98, 502, 638.

21. Ibid., p. 416. Cromwell at times seems to me a secret Hobbesian, with a regime based strictly on paralysis before the Titan, subject to every force that made it, unable to survive without fear.

22. For a general study of the Puritan mind, see William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938). Consider in connection with Puritan ferocity and success his pp. 141 and 162. Consider also Fraser, p. 377, and a remark by Everett H. Emerson on p. 43 of his *English Puritanism: From John Hooper to John Milton* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1968): "Puritanism at the very least provided a rationale for many who otherwise could not have been stirred to take arms against their sovereign."

23. See Hill, pp. 222–24. See also Eric Voegelin's "Gnostic Revolution—The Puritan Case," in *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 147–48, in particular: "such men usually indulge in negations of the present grievances."

24. Hill, p. 98.

25. Fraser, p. 206.

26. Cromwell, to the newly assembled Barebones Parliament, July 4, 1653 (Fraser, p. 433). See also Hill, p. 227: "It is the work of the day to give God no rest till he sets up Jerusalem as the praise of the whole world"; and further, p. 226, where Cromwell may be seen changing "waited on God" to "wrestled with God" in the text of his report to the Commons. Woodhouse, p. 51, argues that the Puritan zeal for the Kingdom "mitigated" against their devotion to liberty; following Hilaire Belloc (another earlier biographer), I would say "abrogated."

27. See Fraser, pp. 91–92, where we can learn of Cromwell steeling his men to kill the king in battle as early as 1641. For the sequence of evidence, see Fraser, pp. 220–21, at Putney; p. 221, on Cromwell's frightening letter about a plot to kill Charles; and p. 264 for the *Remonstrance*. Also useful on stages of his development is C. V. Wedgwood's *A Coffin for King Charles* (New York: Time Inc., 1966), pp. 18, 23–24.

28. Cromwell's letter to Colonel Hammond proves that his mind was already settled (Fraser, pp. 266–67); on the charade with Charles, consider also Lord Denbigh's last visit to Windsor (Wedgwood, p. 67).

29. Fraser, pp. 273–74.

30. Ibid., pp. 275–82.

31. Ibid., p. 158.

32. Eric Voegelin in *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1968) describes the gnostic posture in realizing "the Christian idea of perfection" as follows: "All gnostic movements are involved in the project of abolishing the constitution of being, with its origin in divine, transcendent being, and replacing it with a world-immanent order of being, the perfection of which lies in the realm of human action. This is a matter of so altering the structure of the world, which is perceived as inadequate, that a new, satisfying world arises" (pp. 99–100).

33. Fraser, p. 254.

34. Ibid., p. 38. The point is that the sound makes for the madness and sustains that temper so long as it continues.

35. Ibid., p. 524.

36. Ibid., p. 587.

37. Ibid., p. 643.

38. For a survey of American religio-political millenarianism, I recommend Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962). For a view of Lincoln as gnostic, see my "Lincoln's New Frontier: A Rhetoric for Continuing Revolution," *Triumph*, VI (May, 1971), 11–13, 21; VI (June, 1971), pp. 15–17.

39. For links between Grant and the Ironsides, consider the former's reference to himself as instrument of providence, his description of depredations by freedmen on the women and children of Mississippi as just "retribution"; his apology to Congressman Washburne for failing to see early that slavery had to end *only* because it threatened "Union"; and his related comment to Bismarck that the "peculiar institution" was guilty by association with secession—Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), pp. 8–9, 17, 127, 390. See also Wilson, pp. 141, 171. For evidence of Sherman's part in the Puritan *mythos*, see Wilson, pp. 175–78, 189, and especially p. 192, where the Ohio general equates "fear of the Lord" with fear of his troops.

40. Stark Young, *So Red the Rose* (New York: Scribner's, 1934), pp. 297–307; 324–27.

41. For the evidence behind this impression, I recommend C. V. Wedgwood's *The King's Peace, 1637–1641* and *The King's War, 1641–1647* (London: William Collins Sons, 1955 and 1958). Of course, see also Edward, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888), six volumes.

Against Lincoln: A Speech at Gettysburg

To speak on this particular occasion, in this small Pennsylvania town and to this audience is, for a scholar whose opinions concerning Abraham Lincoln have been so widely discussed and systematically misrepresented, a matchless opportunity. For the papers delivered here and the books from which they derive provide a proper context in which to set the record straight, to clarify just what it is that I have maintained against the Emancipator, and what I have not said. And especially this is true of Professor Boritt's remarks on the Whig tradition in American social and economic theory.[1] Beginning with these, I may hope to situate myself in relation to both the best of modern Lincoln scholarship and the relentless gravity of the Lincoln myth, contribute to the larger conversation of this conference and still stand aside from its drift in the rigor of my criticism of the sixteenth President of the United States.

For the past three years the mere rumor of my complaints against the continuing influence of Father Abraham's example on the nation's public life has seemed to have a life of its own, surviving and even growing in inverse proportion to the number of times when some deflation or correction of it has been attempted in my own work or in the writings of my friends. What I think of Lincoln has therefore become an issue wholly apart from what I really think of Lincoln—an issue for editorials, front-page reports and passionate commentary—all to my general astonishment and painful instruction. In one sense it may thus be argued that the press caricature of my view of Lincoln is a confirmation of the case I make against the influence of the Lincoln myth operating to the contrary of thoughtful deliberation where the great questions of our era are concerned: pushing us instead, with diction and rhetoric, in the direction of mindless obedience

and quasi-religious submission to the secular religion summarized by the greatest monument in Washington City, the Lincoln Memorial.

With respect to Lincoln I have been the subject of outraged reports issuing from Keene, New Hampshire to Los Angeles, California—and from such various sources as the *New York Times*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, *New Republic*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *New York Review of Books*, and the CBS afternoon news. It would appear that my real function in all of these has been like that of Goldstein in George Orwell's *1984*, as rhetorical icon or symbolic adversary. I have found that I "favor slavery," consider it to be a "tenuous multiracial experiment" yet to receive the final verdict of history, and that I censure Lincoln because of "what he did for racial equality." My "destructive idea" is that due process of law was violated by the Emancipation Proclamation. My reservations concerning Lincoln's epideictic, quasi-Biblical rhetoric are described as "insulting to Lincoln's idea of liberty." And the very errors embodied in such wild charges, requiring (as they do) some rejoinder, "prove" that there is something wrong with my character, regardless of their implausibility. Furthermore, I have been described as "committed to the proposition that popular sovereignty defines the nature of democratic government," and of causing my erstwhile associate, George Will, to seethe and "smolder" by implying an admiration for the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act. I have "overturned the Declaration of Independence," called Lincoln a "villain" and argued that "there is no right principle of action but self-interest." None of which can be documented from anything I have written.

Even so, despite outrage at a gratuitous, partisan caricature, the misrepresentation of my views is proof of how careful Lincoln scholars must be in specifying just how much we mean to say—especially if the possibility of reflection on the motives of our political "new messiah" is at stake: proof of the social problem of our research and analysis when it comes up against the force of an hieratic orthodoxy based on the logical fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. For according to the popular argument, the essential ingredients of the myth, since the Union was preserved and the bondsmen set free by the momentous series of events which had as their climax the great battle fought out on this ground and the hero then martyred after the completion of his victory, any criticism of Lincoln is a criticism of those results and a desecration of that sacrifice. Thus if we fault Lincoln in anything it will be

reported that we object to both the purposive and the incidental consequences of his career. Or that we reject even the best possible construction of these results. Or blaspheme. Moreover, goes the inference, that as Lincoln did, so should we, providing for freedom an endless series of "new births." In arranging for such a sequence, the United States may deserve to be described as "the last best, hope of earth."[2] Even now, Lincoln's place among us is no merely antiquarian concern. As current demonstration of his continuing (and irrational) influence I need only mention the habit of Paul Simon of Illinois in using his anger with my "terrible" Lincoln essays as ethical proof of his right to a seat in the United States Senate in 1984.[3] It is still important for any public figure or politician to "get right with Lincoln," even if he is confused about what the effort will cost him and where the example of Lincoln's total career will lead.

The focus of my work in Lincoln studies is upon the language and rhetorical strategy of what Lincoln wrote and said. This emphasis brings me to examine directly Lincoln's invocation of the American dream of personal success, his announced devotion to certain "propositional" truths and his dependence upon the authority of "those old-time men" who had accomplished the American Revolution and established the Republic where "the original idea" of our national enterprise might unfold and prosper. In the pattern of his utterance and the relation of his words to his life I have found reason to consider Lincoln as primarily a *rhetor* and to treat his speeches and other writings, in all of their opportunistic variety, not as expressions of a political philosophy, but as exercises in management and manipulation, an artful music played to lift and lower the passions and, in behalf of a "policy" never fully stated (in fact, altered as he went along), to persuade.[4] It is in the context of an essentially rhetorical identity that Lincoln invokes a version of the American dream—Professor Boritt's "right-to-rise economics." But Lincoln is no more consistent about that doctrine than he is about other questions of principle. Or any more straightforward in inclining, as he does from the beginning of his political life, toward packaging up a "black cockade" Federalist substance inside a democratic, Jacksonian wrapper:

> . . . I presume you all know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for the Legislature. My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance. I

> am in favor of a national bank. . . in favor of the internal improvement system and a high protective tariff.[5]

Add to this oxymoronic posturing related commitments to protection of the interests of property, land policies which served the advantage of speculators and general sympathy with the business and professional classes (as opposed, for instance, to farmers, Negro freedmen, or immigrant laborers)—to the idea that wealth, political order and personal liberty come "down from the top"—and you have the image of an orthodox Whig covered up by a Democratic persona—a potent and calculated brew, with an egalitarian touch of "poor mouth" tossed in for a soupçon. But nothing any conservative Republican of our time could endure, even from a distance.

By his remark that government should "do for a community of people, [that] which they need to have done, but can not do, *at all*, or can not, *so well do*, for themselves," Lincoln drew a blank check on the bank of political necessity.[6] His devotion to liberal economics was like his devotion to " . . . Mind, all conquering mind" and to "cold, calculating unimpassioned reason."[7] And like his attachment to the moderate rhetoric of Washington, Webster, and Clay.[8] He stuck by them so long as convenient, so long as they fed fuel into that little "engine" which knew no rest, his political ambition, whose hopes for building a political party and with it, reconstituting the government of the United States—as Solon had "remade" Athens and Lycurgus Sparta in olden times—depended on a certain flexibility: a policy "to have no policy." None of which is to say that Lincoln did not, other things being equal, prefer free states to slaveholding states, honest elections to stolen votes, the letter of the Constitution (read in a Hamiltonian way) to usurpation and tyranny, and the fruits of a free economy to fiat money, graft, peculation, and wealth created by the sponsorship of the state. And also peace to war. But not enough to put these preferences ahead of his political advantage. Lincoln perceived as primarily a rhetorician is more or less the mixed figure of Ludwell Johnson's recent analysis of the War Between the States, a man political in most public things, but transformed into something very different by the bullet of John Wilkes Booth.[9]

The rhetorical analysis of Lincoln's work, of course, depends in great measure on insights and information developed by other kinds of Lincoln scholarship—some of it the handiwork of my associates in this conference. For rhetorical criticism derives some of its authority

from a well developed sense of the context in which a specific effort at persuasion must occur. Where the Framers of the Constitution are concerned, I have drawn up my own measure of the distance between "the old policy of the Fathers" and Lincoln's distortion of their teachings.[10] With respect to other facets of Lincoln's career, I have learned much from such commentators as Donald W. Riddle, John S. Wright, Edmund Wilson, Gottfried Dietze, V. Jacque Voegeli, Eugene H. Berwanger, Leon Litwack, Harry Jaffa, Willmoore Kendall, and James A. Rawley.[11] But the reason I understand Lincoln as I do is what I find in the text of Roy Basler's edition: the trope of affected modesty; the *oraculum* (speaking, in the epideictic vein, the language of the gods); the *diabole* (slandering, predicting the worst); the *argumentum ad populum* (flattering the people); the false dilemma (*crocodilities*—unacceptable choices); and, especially, the argument *ad verecundiam* (an appeal to traditional values, to the prescription of the Revolution). Only the last of these strategies involves a serious pretense of rationality; and even in appealing to an imaginary history, Lincoln is being duplicitous. Contrary to the ethics of rhetoric, he is employing all of these techniques to essentially self-serving ends: to inspire fear and anger in other men that they might act as they otherwise would not, if he were a less skillful rhetorician. In his mastery of the arts of persuasion, Lincoln leads all the other Presidents of the United States. Even when he is talking about economics; or slaves; or when he affirms the value and authority of the Union.

My favorite proofs of Lincoln's astonishing flexibility come from his statements about slavery and the Negro because, as I have learned from his thoughtless admirers, the devotees of the myth are made most uncomfortable by seeing them combined in a certain way. It is probable that Lincoln disliked Negro slavery during most of his life, just as it is obvious that most Southerners recognized slaves as human beings in that they hoped to see them accept Christianity.[12] But the evidence is clear that Lincoln was engaged in moralistic posturing when he spoke of his "hatred" for the "peculiar institution." Otherwise we have a lot of trouble explaining his action in the 1847 Matson case, in which he attempted to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law and recover runaways. And even more trouble (in view of what he had said about living off the "sweat of other men's faces") in explaining the case he filed in Lexington, Kentucky, October 2, 1849, to recover Todd slaves from Robert Wickliff, who had married into the family of

Robert Todd.[13] Lincoln handled the interests of the older Todd children in the dispersal of their father's estate between 1849 and 1851.[14] This dispersal involved the sale of Negroes—as is clear from the Fayette County Court papers. The Lincolns did not scruple to take money from these sales—as Abraham Lincoln's public rectitude about such profits after 1854 would lead us to expect. When the Railsplitter got too intense about this question, he verged toward the hypocritical. Hence the measuring of distance between Lincoln's words and deeds.

The record of his rhetoric does indeed turn on October 16, 1854 with his speech against Senator Stephen Douglas and the Kansas-Nebraska Act in Peoria, Illinois, and then intensifies further in the June 16, 1858 speech at Springfield, Illinois, "A House Divided."[15] For in his August 1852 speeches to the Springfield Scott Club, Lincoln praised the Whigs for pacifying Southern fears of abolitionist excesses, for refusing to claim a special understanding of the Divine Will, and for avoiding all arguments from definition or original uses of the Presidential power. His villain in these remarks is that "wicked free-soiler," Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire, who is satirized as "darker" than the mulatto girl of an old song. This is the Lincoln who told racial jokes and who had attacked Martin Van Buren for entertaining too advanced a view of Negro rights, not the Lincoln who spoke of "two universal armed camps engaged in a death struggle against each other."[16] This is the Lincoln who urged his friends to be quiet about "white only" clauses in Western state constitutions; who allowed for serfdom on "loyal" plantations and spoke of emancipation as a "root, hog, or die" opportunity; and who, in his First Inaugural, agreed to accept a thirteenth amendment to the Constitution which would have precluded any effort at the Federal level (including any later constitutional amendment) to make this country *all* one thing, or *all* the other" in the matter of slavery. We may set over against this Lincoln all of the familiar passages which more recent Lincoln scholars (who are determined to save him from his record) delight in quoting, and then add to them recent arguments on how he was about to transcend his "own feelings," as described in Illinois in 1858, and move toward the radical Republican camp on the question of the rights of the freedmen. This is the Lincoln who, had he lived, would have come out for fair housing in Chicago and the 1964 Civil Rights Act—a product of wishful thinking. That is, unless Republican

politics had required that he move in such a direction—*in both North and South*, which even Professor Oates is not likely to argue.[17]

I have here briefly emphasized the contradictions of Lincoln on slavery and race. But the focus could be turned as well to many other elements in Lincoln's career—his relations to persons, his view of power, his religion—or his attachment to the dreams of economic opportunity for all. In the latter instance we need think only of his suggestion that "the foreman" of his "green printing office," Salmon P. Chase, "give his paper mill another turn" and create a little money whenever funds ran short. Even on the subjects of millenarian hope and chiliastic rhetoric he "teaches it both ways," complaining quickly when someone uses the *ipse dixit* on him.

But, all of his arguments *ad hominem* in behalf of his own moral refinement aside, the case against a generous enthusiasm for the political prescription left to us by Abraham Lincoln turns on whether or not his was the *best* way to save the Union and free the slaves. Yet Lincoln did not save "the Union as it was." Rather, as the scholarship tends to agree, he played the central role in transforming it forever into a unitary structure based on a claim to power in its own right, a teleocratic instrument which, in the name of any cause that attracts a following, might easily threaten the liberties of those for whose sake it existed. By his success in getting elected on the basis of his rectitude concerning slavery, limited as that morality was by its anti-Negro base of support, Lincoln was the central agent in precipitating war. And his way of freeing the slaves—at bayonet point, in the midst of war, confined in a South angry and without means, with no Federal plan for an intermediate period of apprenticeship in freedom—in some respects is to blame for the nation's continuing problem with the Negro, which even today has not been resolved. Therefore, I refuse on principle to share in that enthusiasm, because I honor those original "political institutions" praised by Lincoln in his first important speech, to the Springfield Young Men's Lyceum in January of 1838.

There is another view of Lincoln's career and the events which surround it not suggested by the fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, a reading which carries a very different political lesson.[18] Our labor is to assure that the sacrifice made here and on other ground hallowed since shall not be dishonored by the apostate vanity and intellectual arrogance of those beneficiaries of remembered courage who would, even now, distort its meaning to serve lesser causes of their own and

would use Lincoln to accomplish their distortion. In all of his protean complexity, the sad man from Illinois deserves a better fate.

NOTES

A speech given at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania on September 15, 1984, as part of a Gettysburg College conference on the occasion of Abraham Lincoln's 175th anniversary.

1. Evidence developed in Gabor S. Boritt's *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (Memphis, TN: Memphis State University Press, 1978), which I find to be generally persuasive.

2. See vol. V, p. 537 of Roy Basler's edition of *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953).

3. Demonstrated on p. 34 of *The Wall Street Journal* of March 6, 1984.

4. My comments on Lincoln's rhetoric appear in *A Better Guide Than Reason: Studies in the American Revolution* (La Salle, IL: Sherwood Sugden & Co., 1979), pp. 29–57 and 185–203; in "Dividing the House: The Gnosticism of Lincoln's Rhetoric," *Modern Age*, 23 (1979), 10–24; and in "The Lincoln Legacy: A Long View," *Modern Age*, 24 (1980), 355–63.

5. Quoted on pp. 65–66 of Lord Charnwood's *Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1917).

6. *Works*, II, p. 220.

7. *Works*, I, p. 279.

8. On the Whig disposition to favor a moderate rhetoric on divisive questions, see Irving H. Bartlett, *Daniel Webster* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 252; Clement Eaton, *Henry Clay and the Art of American Politics* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957), pp. 129–31; and *Annals*, 15th Cong., 2nd Sess., 9/15/1819, pp. 1174–75.

9. I refer to Ludwell H. Johnson's *Division and Reunion: America, 1848–1877* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978).

10. *Works*, III, p. 538.

11. Donald W. Riddle, *Congressman Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1957); John S. Wright, *Lincoln and the Politics of Slavery* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1970); Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 99–130; Gottfried Dietze, *America's Political Dilemma: From Limited to Unlimited Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968); V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1967); Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1973); Willmoore Kendall, "Equality: Commitment or Ideal," *Phalanx*, I (1967), and (with George Carey), *Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1970); and James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1969).

12. My answer to Harry Jaffa's claim (in "Equality, Justice, and the American Revolution: In Reply to Bradford's 'The Heresy of Equality'," *Modern Age*, 21 [1977], 114–26) that the "authentic" representation of the Old South appears in Alexander Stephens's Corner Stone speech of March, 1861, an appeal to racial theory. There is no purpose in extending the Divine Grace made available to men through the death

of God's Son to creatures less than human. Differences in race pale into insignificance in the context of such connections.

13. *Works*, IX, p. 333. See Kentucky *Reports*, 51, 289.

14. See Fayette County Court Papers File, 1849–1851.

15. *Works*, II, pp. 247–283; 461–69.

16. *Works*, II, p. 248.

17. I refer specifically to Stephen B. Oates's *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), which exaggerates outrageously the connection between Lincoln and the cause of Civil Rights in our day.

18. To find it we should apply to Lincoln's career the machinery of modern political theory as it applies to the English Puritans—especially pp. 110–13 and 124–32 of Eric Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

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